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(PAGE 34)**

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LIVES OF
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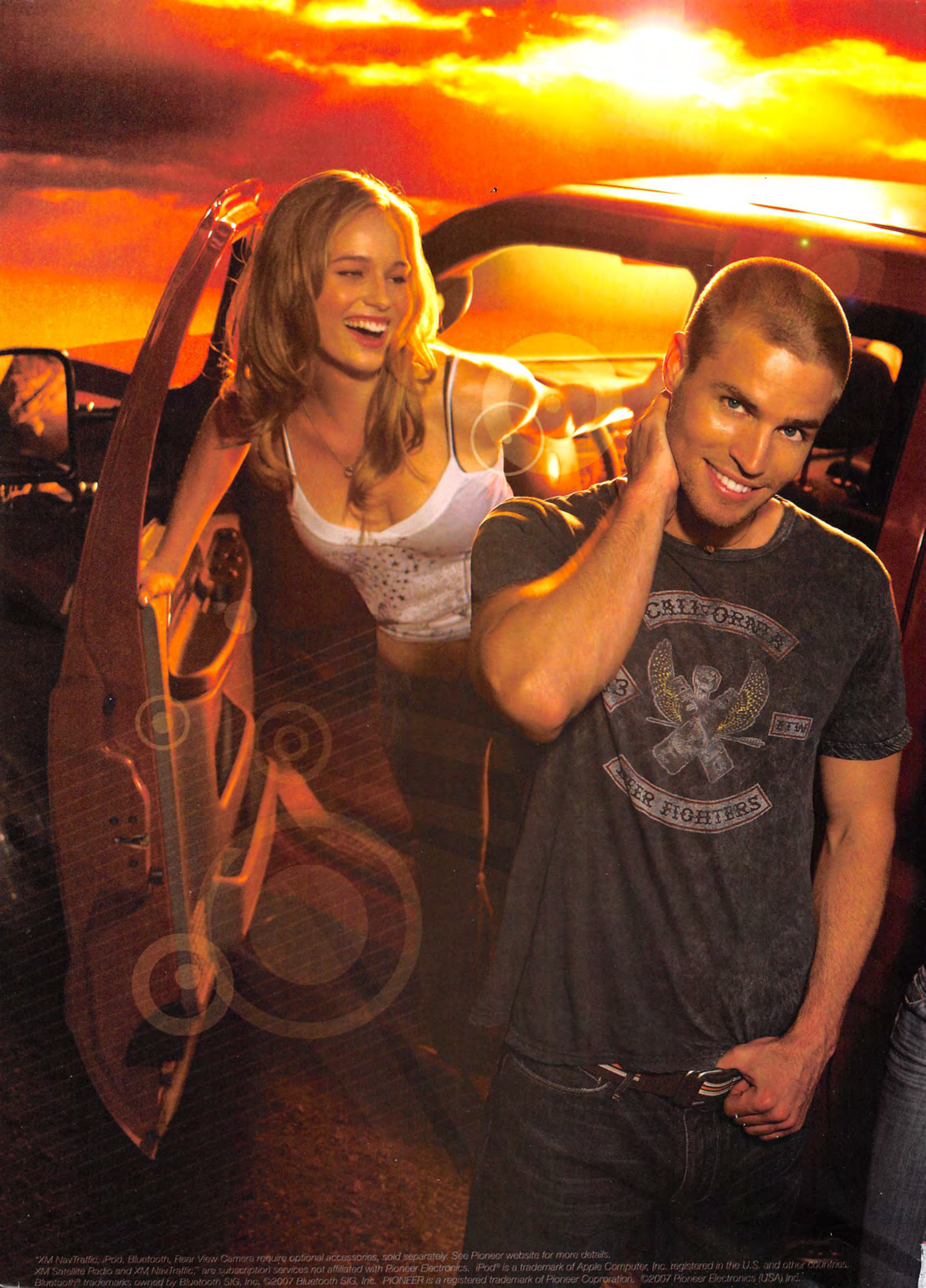
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PLAY THESE



HALO 3

MICROSOFT; XBOX 360

The *Halo* trilogy ends on a high (-caliber) note, seizing the coveted console-shooter crown for the third straight time. Be prepared to mind-meld with your Xbox 360 for the rest of the fall.

HEAVENLY SWORD

SONY; PS3

The hottest warrior princess since Xena stars in this hack-'n'-slash game, which mixes talky exposition (for the ladies) with hours upon hours of ass-kicking (for the rest of us).

Halo 3: Man, Daft Punk got badass!



SEE THESE



THE CURE

Sure, Robert Smith looks like he's slowly morphing from Edward Scissorhands into Elizabeth Taylor—but that shouldn't stop you from rocking (and moping) out with his 31-year-old gloom-rock institution. Their current arena tour rolls from Washington, D.C., (9/19) to Chicago (9/29) to Los Angeles (10/14).

!!!

This Brooklyn art-funk troupe is one of hipsterdom's ass-shakingest live acts. This club tour, shimmying from Los Angeles (9/26) to Austin, Texas, (10/2) to Boston (10/12), will feature rabble-rousing favorites like "Me and Giuliani Down by the Schoolyard" and the new heavy-breathing single "Must Be the Moon."

Robert Smith is having a low-water-pressure day ...



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MOVIE

KURT COBAIN ABOUT A SON

This poignant documentary features never-before-heard audiotape interviews with the late Nirvana frontman—about his childhood, his band, his relationship with Courtney and his suicidal thoughts—set to impressionistic footage shot in and around Cobain's old haunts.



"Can someone reach in my pocket and hand me some smack?"

TV

30 ROCK

Blender's favorite sitcom—starring hilarious real-life lunatic Tracy Morgan—returns for season two. The premiere features guest star Jerry Seinfeld (playing himself), but we've got our fingers crossed for more Ghostface cameos this season. Premieres October 4.

DVD

KISSOLOGY: VOLUME TWO 1978-1991

Live footage abounds on this expansive 4-DVD set, but the real jewel is Kiss in *Attack of the Phantoms*, a gleefully atrocious thriller in which the band tangles with an evil amusement-ride inventor.

ONLINE

DINNER WITH THE BAND

This Web series is part live concert and part cooking show. Watch indie artists like Tokyo Police Club and El-P rock out ... and then pick up some quick recipes perfect for grueling tours.

SPIN THESE



1 ANIMAL COLLECTIVE STRAWBERRY JAM DOMINO

The Brooklyn noise troupe spews free-associative lyrics over computer spasms—the result is nine catchy sing-alongs beamed out from the weirdest playground on earth.



2 KIA SHINE DUE SEASON UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

Whether he's flaunting \$1,000 sneakers or updating his MySpace profile, this charismatic Tennessee MC has one thing on the brain: looking his flyest.



3 JOHNATHAN RICE FURTHER NORTH REPRISE

A sarcastic, pessimistic and thoroughly engrossing set from this SoCal singer-songwriter. (Don't hate him 'cause he's dating Jenny Lewis.)



4 PLIES THE REAL TESTAMENT SLIP-N-SLIDE/ATLANTIC

Don't let "Shawty," featuring T-Pain's dulcet come-ons, fool you. On his rowdy debut, this gruff-voiced Florida thug is a total brute—and lovin' it!



5 ELVIS COSTELLO MY AIM IS TRUE HIP-O/JUME

Declan MacManus's debut, full of writerly rants about girls and class, hit a spot where R&B becomes punk. Dweeby anguish never sounded so sweet.



10 1990S "YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE MY FRIEND"

ROUGH TRADE

Mix a little AC/DC riffage, some Glasgow swagger and Britpop sighs, and you've got this track, aimed at any bro who isn't carrying out his bro-ly duties.

11 THE GOOD LIFE "HEARTBROKE"

SADDLE CREEK

A bouncy little passive-aggression ditty, aimed at an ex-girlfriend who was clearly not that into this dude.

12 GARY ALLAN "WATCHING AIRPLANES"

MCA NASHVILLE

Bittersweet country lament about bidding bon voyage to love. Perfect for your next breakup with an air-traffic controller.

13 SIMIAN MOBILE DISCO "IT'S THE BEAT"

WICHITA

English remix experts step out on their own with some glitchy electro. More fun than a dance floor full of monkeys ... on wheels.

14 JA RULE FEAT. LIL WAYNE "UH OHHH"

THE INC./UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

Hip-hop's onetime punching bag launches his comeback bid with this surprisingly hot sing-along. Sadly, he declines to rhyme the title with "SpaghettiOs."

15 THIEVES LIKE US "DRUGS IN MY BODY"

KITSUNE

This NYC-via-Berlin-via-Sweden crew debuts with a dreamy dance-rock jam about being depressed and doing lots of drugs.

16 COHEED AND CAMBRIA "THE RUNNING FREE"

COLUMBIA

Upstate New York's finest prog goblins unleash another blast of Narnia metal, this time with 85 percent more *wuh-ohs*.

17 OKKERVIL RIVER "PLUS ONES"

JAGJAGUWAR

An aching indie-pop ballad that doubles as a math-nerd/music-geek in-joke, with frontman Will Sheff sighing about 100 *luftballoons* and 51 ways to leave your lover.

18 BAND OF HORSES "IS THERE A GHOST?"

SUB POP

From a not-actually-cloven-hooved Seattle trio, yearning, slow-burning indie rock about wondering if your house is haunted ... by love! Paging Peter Venkman ...

19 BIRDMAN FEAT. LIL WAYNE "POP BOTTLES"

CASH MONEY

The 3,286th amazing Weezy appearance this year comes courtesy of his foster papa—who sounds pretty darn good, too!

20 WILL.I.AM "I GOT IT FROM MY MAMA"

WILL.I.AM MUSIC/INTERSCOPE

He's already crafted an insightful treatise on the female anatomy with the Black Eyed Peas' "My Humps." Now the rapper-producer (he's the Pea who's actually talented) steps out on his own with this ode to the biological origins of booty. Gregor Mendel, holla!



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SONG OF THE MONTH

1 DEVENDRA BANHART "TONADA YANOMAMINISTA"

XL
Off his new album, some glorious psych-weirdness from the king of the beardos.

We'll try the next bordello, thanks ...

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2 SHOUT OUT LOUDS "TONIGHT I HAVE TO LEAVE IT"

MERGE

This squad of shaggy, indie-rocking Swedes returns with an unexpectedly upbeat lament—it's two parts Cure, two parts cowbell!

3 JOELL ORTIZ "LATINO"

KOCH

This finely observed Latino-pride jam—alternately joyous and mournful—goes out to the Boricuas, Mexicanos, Cubanos ...

4 M.I.A. FEAT. AFRIKAN BOY "HUSSEL"

INTERSCOPE

Another head-spinner from the Sri Lankan phenom—this time about hustlin', hustlin' (for food in a third-world country).

5 KANYE WEST "GOOD LIFE"

RCA-A-FELLA/DEF JAM

A beatific bit of hip-pop, with a big Jacko sample and a hook from the ubiquitous man-robot himself, T-Pain.

6 MOTION CITY SOUNDTRACK "BROKEN HEART"

EPITAPH

Neurotic pop-punk is alive and kicking with this Midwest fivesome—peep the bizarre video, featuring a man in a giant bloody heart suit trying to do yoga.

7 KEYSHIA COLE FEAT. MISSY ELLIOTT AND LIL' KIM "LET IT GO"

GEFFEN

Ladies' night! Keyshia and homegirls kick out a slow-stirred "dump his ass" jam over the same sample Biggie used on "Juicy."

8 RILO KILEY "CLOSE CALL"

WARNER BROS.

Jenny Lewis bigs up a pickpocket gypsy prostitute over some peeling guitar straight out of the Modest Mouse songbook.

9 FOO FIGHTERS "THE PRETENDER"

ROSWELL/RCA

Dave Grohl and Co. return with another amp-exploding, vocal-cord-shredding face-melter.



NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE REAL ONE

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FEATURES

64/ **KANYE WEST**

He had to convince Jay-Z to give him a record contract. Now, two multiplatinum CDs later, Kanye West is setting his sights beyond hip-hop's borders: "I want to be the No. 1 artist in the world."

72/ **HIM**

Tattooed frontman for Finnish rock gods seeks American youth to join his "love metal" brigade. Turnons: cigarettes, Satan. Turnoffs: comedies, the sun.

81/ **ROCK'S GREATEST DYNASTY**

Blender pits 20 musical clans against one another to determine rock's greatest family of all time. Will it be the Osbournes? The Jacksons? Let's play the Feud!

86/ **VANESSA CARLTON**

The 27-year-old singer-pianist on breaking up with the dude from Third Eye Blind and loving, *ahem*, hobbits and elves.

88/ **SO YOU THINK YOU CAN SING?**

American Idol summer camp afforded 138 kids the chance to sing their little hearts out—and the show's producers the chance to extend their brand further than ever.

96/ **GEAR GUIDE/FALL '07**

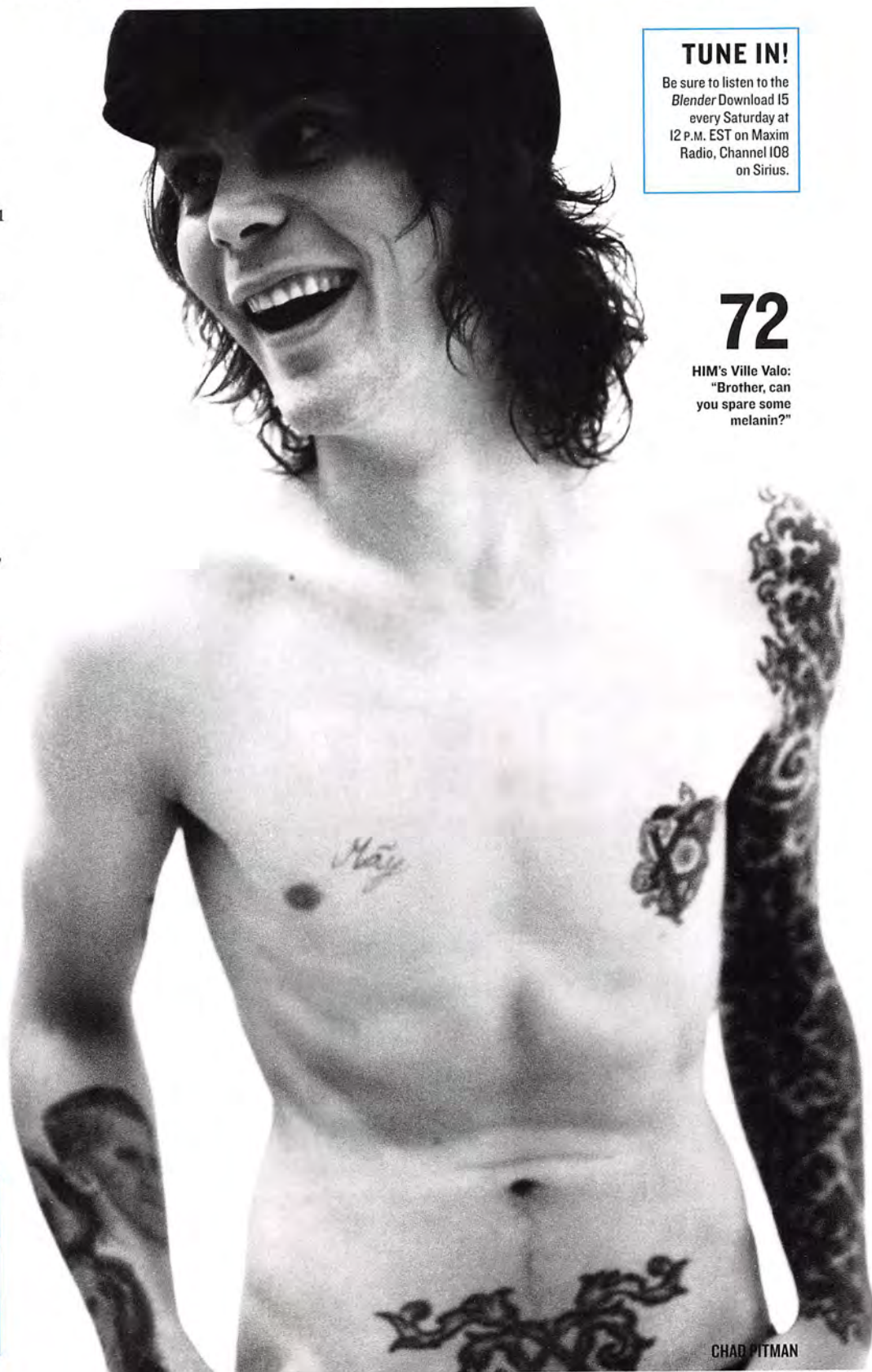
Emo quintet Plain White T's bask in the glow of the season's coolest flat-screen televisions.

TUNE IN!

Be sure to listen to the *Blender* Download 15 every Saturday at 12 P.M. EST on Maxim Radio, Channel 108 on Sirius.

72

HIM's Ville Valo: "Brother, can you spare some melanin?"



ON THE COVER
KANYE WEST
PHOTOGRAPH BY
TERRY RICHARDSON

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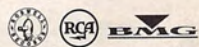
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Blackstreet's massive hit about a fly girl with attitude
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Monkey Boy

I never imagined I'd be jealous of a chimpanzee, but that's exactly how I felt after seeing your pictures of Andy Samberg ("Andy Samberg's Awesomely Retarded Awesome Zone!" September) goofing around with that monkey. Samberg is the floppy-haired man-boy of my dreams! He truly deserved the No. 1 slot on your "Hot Report."

Heather S., Long Beach, CA

Monster Hit

Andy Samberg is funny, but Tracy Morgan—No. 40 on the "Hot Report"—is a laugh riot. I nearly pissed myself imagining the crazy way he delivered his "hot insult" about being so ugly that he "could stick yo' face in dough and make monster cookies." That line has become my new insult of choice.

Jason Levine, Somerville, MA

We're Bringing Hinderback

While I agree with most of your musical picks for the "Hot Report"—who can argue with M.I.A., the White Stripes and Arcade Fire?—I have to take issue with your awarding the bands Hinder and Nickelback (a.k.a. Hinderback) the No. 6 position on your list. Call me a snob, but I just don't see how selling shitloads of albums to fans in the flyover states qualifies these middling groups as "hot."

Anton3000, New York

Dude, put down your \$16 apple martini. Jäger shots are on us!



Andy Samberg knew his Animal Husbandry degree would come in handy someday.

Reader Loves Chachi

Blender, I'm baffled by your "Hot Report." You included Bret Michaels but left off his fellow VH1 reality star Scott Baio? I know Chachi's not as rock & roll as the lead singer of Poison, but Scott's show is great and he's still got his boyish good looks. Meanwhile, all Bret Michaels has is the memory of his girlish good looks.

jenna.twist, Little Rock, AR

Paisley's in Style

I was amazed to see Brad Paisley made your "Hot Report"! Not because I don't think he's worthy—I do. It's just that music mags usually overlook mainstream country artists in favor of acts who hardly sell any records but are deemed "cool." And, as his song about checking a girl for ticks shows, he's as funny as any of the comedians on your list.

werangler88, Nashville

Indecent Proposal

I find it curious that Rilo Kiley hottie Jenny Lewis ("Hot Report," September) wrote a whole album about pornography despite claiming that she doesn't watch the stuff. I consider myself something of a porn aficionado, so if Jenny wants someone to introduce her to some of the finer XXX titles available, I am at her service.

Mark D., Muncie, IN

Jesus, we need a better spam blocker.

For Pete's Sake

Blender, can you do me a favor and call a moratorium on mentioning Pete Wentz in your magazine? As if reading the Fall Out Boy bassist's insipid insights about life on the road in your "Collect Call From ... Fall Out Boy" story (August) wasn't bad enough, then you had to go and include him on "The Powergeek 25" list for his insipid contributions to the Internet. >>

If Pop Stars Were Dogs ...

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I really can't take much more of this guy-liner-wearing buffoon!

Dan Plankett, Troy, MI

Just for that, we're commissioning Pete Wentz to write us a 5,000-word essay on insipid reader letters.

Naked Contempt

Oh, man, did you have to name "You Shook Me All Night Long" one of the Greatest Songs Ever (September)? As a stripper, I hear that song every goddamn night—sometimes multiple times. Great? Try "grating." The only song more annoying to my ears at this point is Mötley Crüe's "Girls, Girls, Girls."

Amber S., Hartford, CT

No Love Lost

How hypocritical can Courtney Love get? She's the queen of "Kurtsploitation" ("Hot Report"), letting some cheesy company make Kurt Cobain lunch boxes, yet she protests when Dr. Martens uses her late husband in an advertisement? Could it possibly be because she wasn't going to make any cash out of the ad?

Leafblowah999, Las Cruces, NM

Monkee Tales

Someone ought to ask Kelly Clarkson ("Kelly Clarkson and the Bubblegum Machine," August) if she's ever heard of the Monkees. They had nearly the same battle with their own Clive Davis 40 years ago. Actually, I'd find an article on the Monkees far more interesting. Though I'd rather look at photos of Kelly than of Peter Tork.

Corey Rotic, Cleveland

What if we were able to convince Peter Tork to take his shirt off?

Paris in the Spring!

That sensuous photo of Paris-based rapper Uffie you ran in September's issue really put the hot in your "Hot Report." So I downloaded some of her songs, and you're right—she can't rap her way out of a paper bag! Still, nothing could stop me from seeing her perform live if I ever get the chance. *Ooh la la!*

oldskoolfool808, Boston

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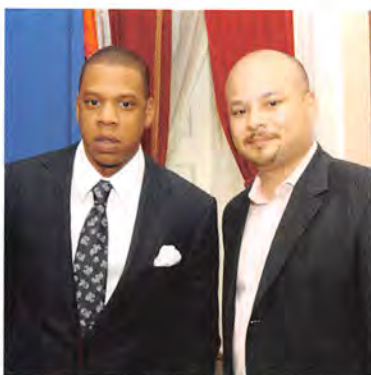
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The Old Crüe

Does Nikki Sixx ("Dear Superstar," September) have no shame? I mean, the guy's 48 friggin' years old and still teasing out his hair, showing off his tats and generally acting like he's 18. Right after I'm done with this letter, I'm going to write my congressman asking him to sponsor legislation enforcing a mandatory retirement age for heavy-metal dudes.

Rainmaker1984, Portland, OR

Bonna-rude!

After reading your entertaining "The Worst Jobs in Rock & Roll" story (September), I am moved to make an apology to the Bonnaroo cleanup crew. I'm not proud to admit that I was one of the concertgoers who left my campsite strewn with crushed beer cans, used condoms and, yes, "buckets of human excrement." Let's just say I was a little out of my head that weekend. Sorry!

Mike T., Athens, GA

Buckets? Couldn't you have taken a lesson from the hog farmers of America and found a nice river or stream to dump it in?

All About Eve

Thank you, *Blender*, for getting the beautiful Eve ("Hot Report") to reveal her preferred pickup line ("I think you're cute; can I have your number?"). If I'm ever fortunate enough to run into the rapper, I won't employ my usual line: "Are those space boots? 'Cause you are outta this world!" You'd be surprised how often that one works, though.

Highway69, Andover, MA

McKnight Moves

Wait, R&B star Brian McKnight isn't hot ("Un-Fuego," September)? You could've fooled me and my husband—we conceived our first child while listening to a Brian McKnight album! That was one heck of a hot evening.

Lovelyday23, Peoria, IL

Mom, you're embarrassing us!



Eve, pissed that Adam didn't show for the reunion.

Sisterly Love

I'm glad you put "cute sister acts" in your "Hot Report"—it gave you a good excuse to publish another picture of the Pierces. I've been smitten with Allison and Catherine Pierce ever since you ran an "Almost Famous" story on

them in June. Tegan and Sara ain't bad either, but their ironic mullets are a turnoff.

Darkforest13, Jacksonville, AR

Makes Him Wanna Hurl

Your Q&A with Akon ("Who Does Akon Think He Is?" September) only made me hate him more. Throwing a poor fan offstage in June "was all in fun"? I'm a *big* guy, and if I ever meet Akon I'm going to lift him over my head and give him a taste of his own medicine!

Steven S., Atlanta

No Tokey, No Washy

I loved your story about how a strung-out Fergie once hallucinated that a man was hiding in her clothes hamper ("Methalicious," September). I'd like to have a man hiding in my hamper—as long as he did my laundry every week! Where can I get me some crystal meth?

John C., Tampa, FL

Blender's Burning Question

WHAT IS JOHN MAYER THINKING OF RIGHT NOW?

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DISPLACED
POLAR BEARS

25%
JESSICA SIMPSON

7%
YNGWIE MALMSTEEN
DELUXE BOX SET

20%
JOE SIMPSON



READER WISDOM

"JOHN CARES MORE ABOUT BEARS ... RIGHT?"

Jessica Kellogg, Omaha, NE

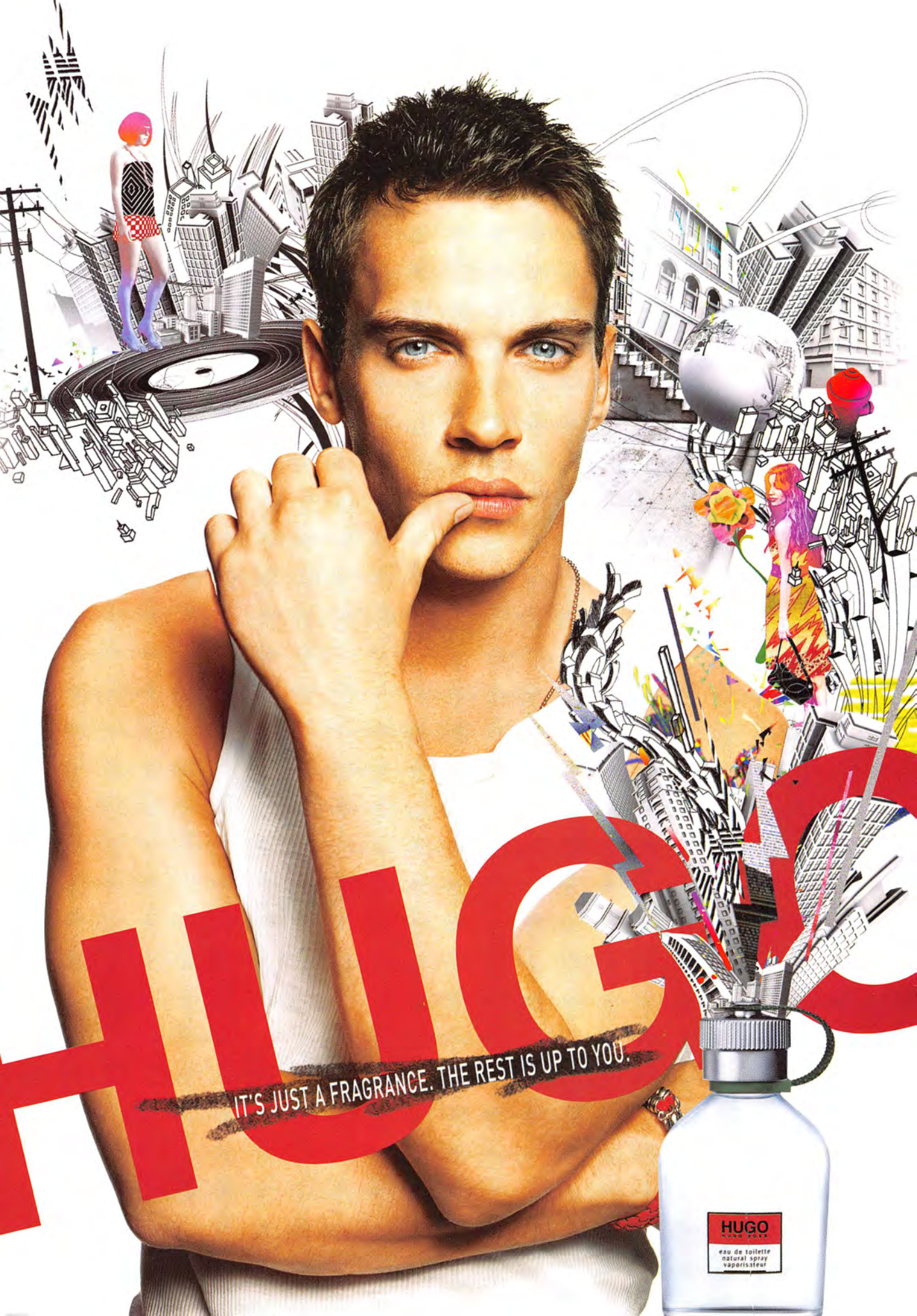
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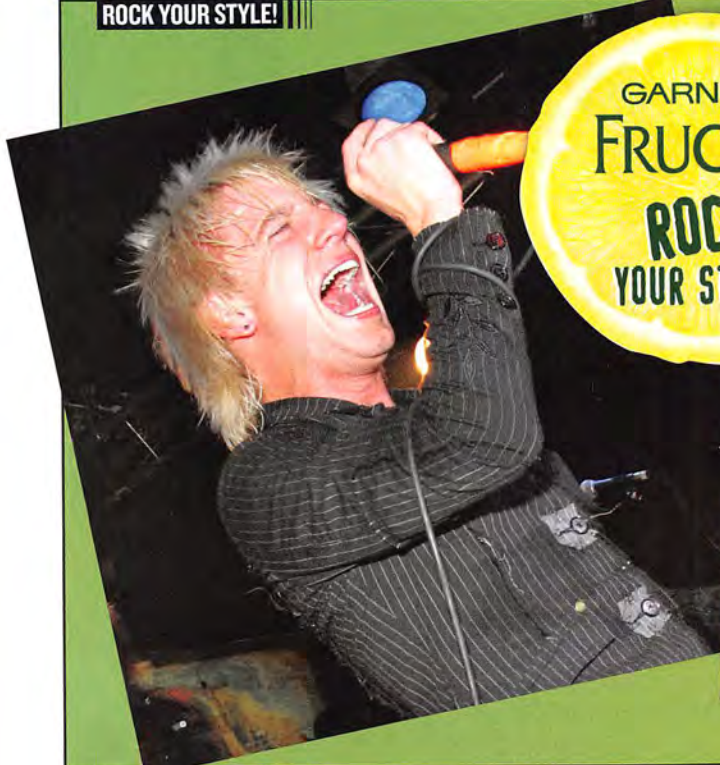
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SOBERING

Amy Winehouse says yes, yes, yes—and then no, no, no—to rehab after cocaine, heroin scare

U.K. TABLOIDS CLAIM that after suffering a drug overdose, Amy Winehouse voluntarily entered the exclusive U.K. Causeway clinic in Essex, but fled by helicopter less than 48 hours later—and that now her parents may take legal action to force her to undergo treatment.

On August 8, Winehouse, 24, was rushed to a London hospital, where, say tabloids, her stomach was pumped and she was given a shot of adrenaline. "It was one of the most terrifying moments of my life," Winehouse told *News of the World*, which reported that she had been on a three-day "pub crawl," ingesting heroin, cocaine, Ecstasy and the horse tranquilizer ketamine. "I've scared myself this time," Winehouse said. "I know things have got to change. I have to sort myself out."

Before entering Causeway, reports say, the "Rehab" singer tried to recuperate DIY-style with her drug-afflicted husband, Blake Fielder-Civil, 25, at a Four Seasons hotel outside London, where she vomited for several days after checking in. According to *The Daily Mirror*, her family staged an emergency intervention after a friend claimed to have found the couple smoking heroin in their room. *Noel Boddie*

Winehouse delivers a cup of chips to paparazzi, late July.



With her unemployed husband, Blake Fielder-Civil.





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TEA TIME!

Against Me! singer arrested for battery



1 Before a gig in Tallahassee, Florida, *Against Me!* frontman Tom Gabel walks into the All Saints Cafe with his girlfriend. He orders a lemon-ginger tea, then wanders off in search of the bathroom.



2 On the way, the punk rabble-rouser sees a defaced flyer for his band's show—some prankster had scrawled obscenities over it. Angry, Gabel tears it off the wall and throws it in the trash.



3 A stranger asks Gabel why he is upset, and after exchanging words, Gabel allegedly grabs him by the neck and knocks his head on the counter. Post show, Gabel is arrested for battery.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Country singer **Mindy McCready** was arrested in Nashville on accusations that she violated her probation by assaulting her mother. In 2004 McCready, 31, illegally obtained OxyContin using someone else's prescription.

With Slash watching from the audience, three of the original members of **Guns N' Roses**—guitarist Izzy Stradlin, bassist Duff McKagan and drummer Steven Adler—performed together with Adler's band, *Adler's Appetite*, at a Hollywood club in late July. Adler is hoping Axl Rose will see fit to join in a full-blown reunion. "I love Axl, and I know he'll make the right call," he said.

After being labeled "indecent" and "obscene" by a group of Muslim students in Malaysia, **Gwen Stefani** will modify her live show and costumes so as to not clash with local Islamic values.

WORD!



"MTV CAN SUCK MY DICK."
50 Cent



FOUL!

Victorious Iraqi soccer team mistakenly feted with Saddam-era national anthem

There's nothing like an ode to a homicidal tyrant to put a damper on a celebratory bash. When the underdog Iraqi national soccer team won a shocking victory in the Asian Cup in July, Sheikh Mohammed, the leader of the oil-rich emirate Dubai, threw the team a party. After chartering a private jet to save them the indignity of flying coach from Indonesia, Mohammed greeted the team at the Dubai airport, along with thousands of well-wishers, by playing Iraq's Saddam Hussein-glorifying national anthem, prompting some players to walk out in protest.

The old paean, "Ardufuratani Watan," which celebrated Saddam's murderous Baath Party, had been replaced by "Mawtini," a popular Arab folk tune, after the dictator's demise. But the technician in charge of the music was apparently unaware of the new anthem's existence. The Iraqi players' umbrage was likely soothed by the \$5.45 million that Dubai's ruler lavished on the team in honor of their win. *David Peisner*

MANBAND

Van Halen make nice with Diamond Dave and reunite

Looking fit and sporting a con man's grin, David Lee Roth and his Van Halen bandmates announced their first tour since Roth quit in 1985. At their L.A. press conference, Roth quipped that the shows, which begin in September, will feature "all the favorites you've been hearing tearing out of the back of a pickup truck at the Burger King drive-thru." Wolfgang Van Halen, Eddie's 16-year-old son, will replace bassist Michael Anthony, but Roth insisted that the music won't lose its self-mocking humor. "Saving the world is Bono's job," Roth said. *Tim Grierson*



"I now pronounce you Dave and Eddie."

ALMOST FAMOUS

Bat for Lashes

Brit singer Natasha Khan dreams of mystical she-bears and counts Thom Yorke and Björk as fans

(By JONAH WEINER Photograph by BOHDAN CAP)

Throughout her adolescence, Natasha Khan was visited by a recurring dream. "I'm swimming in the ocean at night, facing out from this cave," she explains. "Suddenly, this massive white whale starts rushing toward me, closer and closer, until we're just face to face." For the U.K. native, who performs as Bat for Lashes, dreams are a regular source of inspiration, and this one contains several of her favorite motifs: darkness, fear, wonder and, last but not least, an animal.

Khan, 27, the daughter of a Pakistani dad and a British mom, is at a vegetarian restaurant in Brooklyn, New York, wearing a gold feather-shaped earring; there's peacock plumage tattooed on her right wrist. "I've had a few different spirit animals," she notes. "But the most constant has been the she-bear."

On her debut album, *Fur and Gold*, which has already made enthusiastic fans out of Björk, Thom Yorke and Jarvis Cocker, Khan cultivates an animist vibe, singing in a precise, melancholic keening about "creatures of love" and "mystic golden lights." But before you jump to any unflattering conclusions—cough*hippie!*cough—what appeals to Khan most about fairy tales is the way they sneak dark themes beneath seemingly innocuous surfaces: Most songs end gloomily ever after.

It's a dynamic she explores on the single "What's a Girl to Do," a ghostly tribute to the girl-group stylings of the Shangri-Las, in which Khan refuses to give her "bat lightning heart" to a hopelessly-in-love boy. "I tried to make the video a bit like *Donnie Darko* meets *E.T.*," she says. "The best children's stories, for me, involve terrifying encounters, kids leaving safe places and coming into contact with the invisible." She pauses to chew some tempeh. "I try to create the same space in my music."

OUT NOW *Fur and Gold* (Caroline)

All About Me!

FAVORITE CHILDREN'S AUTHOR: "Roald Dahl—I've always loved *The Witches*."

ON BEING A CLOSET DISCO JUNKIE: "I have dance parties to Bobby Brown and the *Flashdance* soundtrack; 'Maniac' always kills."

TYPICAL FRIDAY NIGHT: "Home, making some curry."

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"Yeah, I look like the guy from Dead or Alive. So?"

Do You Rock?

DAVEY HAVOK

Does the AFI singer and one-half of the electro duo Blaak Audio indeed ... rock?

Ever trashed a hotel room?

Only by accidentally spilling hair product and makeup.

Largest number of people you've woken up next to?

Four. One of them was my friend, who's a very large skinhead. The other three were anomalous beautiful people.

Best rumor about yourself?

That I used to date Patrick Swayze.

Ever have a brush with the law?

At the U.S.-Canada border: One of the patrol guys saw my piercing and was like, "You like pain? Would you like it if I hit you with this flashlight?"

Worst tour horror story?

In the early '90s, AFI played a bar, and an audience member put me in a headlock, telling me to end the set and apologize or, he said, "I'll fucking kill you."

Thing you most regret?

My friend offered to send me on a date with Winona Ryder, but I didn't do it because I was in a relationship.

Biggest celeb in your cell phone?

Billie Joe of Green Day.

Ever had a gambling fixation?

I'm a big fan of craps. I've won \$6,000.

Ever kill an animal?

I've been a vegan for 10 years, but when I was young I accidentally killed a butterfly and felt really bad. *Mark Yarm*

VERDICT

Scraps with border patrol? Waking up to "anomalous beautiful people"? Dang! Davey Havok rocks!



OUT NOW CEXCELLS, INTERSCOPE

NEWS ROUNDUP

Madonna is trying to stop the sale of explicit letters and photographs the singer sent to her former boyfriend James Albright in the early '90s for fear they might affect her efforts to adopt a Malawian boy. A company specializing in Madonna memorabilia is reportedly asking \$200,000 for the collection.

Jon Bon Jovi's unsuccessful attempt to force a company to change the name of its Mijovi energy drink because of the similarity to his name has inspired the beverage makers to create a Mijovi-based cocktail called the Angry Rocker.

WORD!



"YEARS AGO, I ASKED MY DAD FOR A BOOB JOB, AND HE SAID IT WOULD CHEAPEN MY IMAGE."

Paris Hilton



Beats making license plates and carving shanks.

FOUND CRAP #5

We Tube ... You Tube

INMATE "THRILLER"

Blender investigates the infamous viral video in which Filipino jailbirds nail a massive, Jacko-inspired dance number *Russ Heller*

BACKSTORY The Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center in the Philippines has a unique method for exercising inmates. Since March 2006, the population has been regularly led into the yard to perform dance routines. In this YouTube clip, they enact a rendition of Michael Jackson's 1983 epic "Thriller," the result of a month of rehearsing.



EYEWITNESS "'Thriller' is one of my favorite songs," says security consultant Byron Garcia, who oversees the revolutionary dance program. Inspired by myriad "Thriller" interpretations on YouTube, he decided to do his own. "None of them did justice to the original." The prisoners, he says, perform voluntarily. "I did not hear anyone refusing!"

AFTERLIFE "Music is the language of the soul, from a sound body comes a sound mind," Garcia says. "If their minds are fit, then they will be conducive to accepting new rules and regulations." The program is so successful, Garcia is planning more musical routines. "I hope to make a blockbuster!"



HOW TO FIND IT Thriller + Jail + Philippines

WACKO!

Prince's diva demands: house, black interiors, oxygen

Prince is reportedly in negotiations to have a five-bedroom mansion built for him on the grounds of London's O2 Arena, site of his 21-day residency in August. It's the latest in a growing list of over-the-top requests. At his London hotel, according to the U.K.'s *Daily Star*, the finicky singer insisted his penthouse be decorated in black, down to the M&Ms machine and the frames holding pictures of himself, and that he have an oxygen bar run by three sexy women. When he performed at the BRIT Awards ceremony this year, he required a special mirror to magnify his reflection. *Noel Boddie*



Prince does the diner scene from *When Harry Met Sally*.

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Quotes by Doug Schneider, GoodSound! in his review of the Atom Monitor

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ROBOT LOVE

Daft Punk end tour on an eyeball-exploding note

More than 12,000 people crammed into Keyspan Park in Coney Island, Brooklyn, on August 9, for the last stop on Daft Punk's audacious *Alive 2007 Tour*. The French techno duo's hard-pounding dance beats were cued to a complex light-and-stage design—stunning, even to those not enjoying hallucinogens, as an informal survey suggested. Outfitted in robot suits, Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter performed from a pyramid rigged with screens that flashed in time with the music. For the encore, their suits were outlined in red LED piping and set against a starry background. The duo plays Las Vegas's Vegoose festival on October 27. *Noel Boddie*

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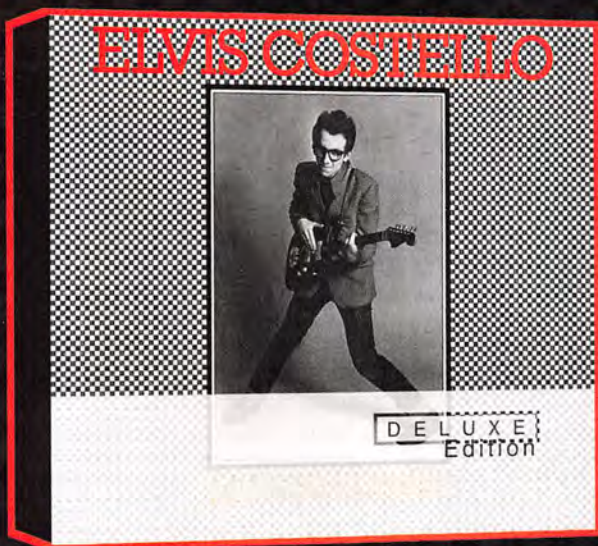
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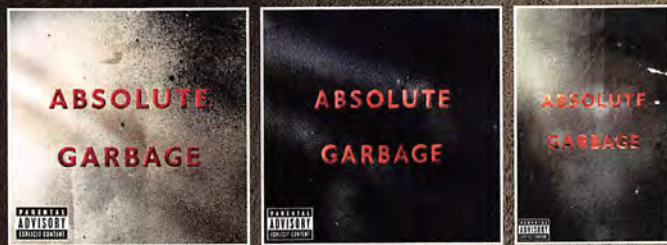
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Manson gives a shout-out to his Mary Kay saleswoman.

ANTISOCIAL SUPERBEEF

Marilyn Manson allegedly loves drugs, Nazis, Chinese skeletons and accusing **My Chemical Romance** of stealing his makeup



Stephen Bier, who went by the moniker Madonna Wayne Gacy during his 17-year tenure

as Marilyn Manson's keyboardist, filed a \$20 million lawsuit against the spooky pop star in early August.

In the contentious papers, Bier accuses Manson of blowing the band's earnings on, among other things, drugs, Nazi memorabilia, now-ex-wife Dita Von Teese's \$150,000 engagement ring and the skeleton of a young Chinese girl. Bier also alleges that Manson forced him from the band after he demanded his share of the band's profits. Manson responded by saying, "I would never spend my money on a Chinese-girl skeleton. It's a Chinese boy."

This intraband feud comes on top of the catfight Manson has already ignited with goth rockers My Chemical Romance. The creepy singer recently revealed that "Mutilation Is the Most Sincere Form of Flattery," a withering track from his latest album, was about My Chemical Romance, whom he believes "are doing a really sad, pitiful, shallow version of what I've done."

MCR's frontman Gerard Way and guitarist Frank Iero don't seem bothered. "The remarks ring hollow," said Way. Iero added, "About the makeup, it's weird to me because I had heard of Alice Cooper before I heard of Marilyn Manson. It would have been nice if he could have said something to our faces, but he's been all smiles every time I've seen him." *David Peisner*

NEWS ROUNDUP

After being caught with a grab bag of drugs (crack, heroin, ketamine and cannabis) while driving, **Pete Doherty** was banned from living in London for a month and ordered to stay clean. The presiding judge warned that the rocker will go to jail if he disobeys.

Adolf Hitler's alleged record collection was recently brought forth by the daughter of its previous owner, a Russian intelligence officer who searched the dictator's bunker in 1945. The trove included albums by Russian composers such as Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, as well as more surprising fare, such as recordings by the Jewish-Austrian pianist Artur Schnabel, who was forced to flee Germany in 1933.

WORD!



"PEOPLE USE MUSIC AS A UTENSIL TO BETTER THEMSELVES."

Jessica Simpson



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BRITNEY SPEARS VS. LINDSAY LOHAN

CURRENT AGE	
25	21
DEATH CALCULATOR STARTS AT	
81	
Embattled: Bitter custody fight for two babies; sent to rehab; accused of canceling interviews, acting "erratic," stealing designer clothes -5	Embattled: In rehab for third time; being sued for assault, reckless driving; accused of poor work ethic; rumored to have stolen designer clothes -3
Exhibitionist/Promiscuous: Seen topless in hotel pool with video extra; reports say she needlessly disrobes -3	Exhibitionist/Promiscuous: Blogs reported she walked around naked in rehab; insists she hates sleeping alone -3
Anger issues: Hurling death threats at paparazzi; attacked a car with an umbrella -5	Anger issues: Allegedly commandeered car to pursue assistant in a high-speed chase, endangering lives, while drunk -7
Scary motorist: Drives one-handed with lapdog on lap; drove Mercedes into a parked car -3	Scary motorist: Arrested for two DUIs, the first involved driving into a tree while reportedly intoxicated -7
Chain-smoker: Ever-present Marlboros; secondary smoke in bars -7	Chain-smoker: Ever-present Marlboros; secondary smoke in bars; has asthma -9
Hired help: Has stress-relieving servants but can't keep them -1	Hired help: Has stress-relieving servants but can't keep them -1
Stimulants: Red Bull, Starbucks -4	Stimulants: Red Bull, caught with coke -12
Surrogate love: When not in rehab, shops compulsively -1	Surrogate love: When not in rehab, shops compulsively -1
Denial: Blames mother and ex-manager for her problems -2	Denial: Claims drugs weren't hers, she wasn't driving ("the black kid was") -2
Fishbowl scrutiny: Has love/hate relationship with cameras -2	Fishbowl scrutiny: Has love/hate relationship with cameras -2
Inner-circle stress: Allegedly cut off cash-dependent family; two failed marriages; surrounds herself with people with questionable motives -11	Inner-circle stress: Cut off ex-con dad; mom is more party pal than parental authority; surrounds herself with people with questionable motives -7
Career free fall: Album release in serious doubt; recent self-organized shows were tacky disasters -3	Career free fall: Last few movies bombed; difficult to insure; album release in serious doubt -3
ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY	
34	24
PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH	
2016	2010
Gerontologist Dr. David Demko: "These ladies are in crisis. A serious break from public life is needed for reevaluating their lives. Their sanity (and longevity) depends on it."	



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HOW TO ...

Live in a Tree

Eco-conscious singer **KT TUNSTALL** explains how to make your home among the branches

(By MARK YARM Photograph by JENNIFER KARADY)

1

Pick a tree

"You need a tree that's fat at the bottom and has nice wide branches, like an oak. You don't want to be living in a pine tree—they're bendy. An ideal height would be 25 feet—you'll get a beautiful view and some nice movement from the wind. The higher you go, the more at risk you are for lightning strikes."

2

Build a house

"Cutting down a tree to build a tree house is just wrong, so use available wood that's already dead or from a sustainable source. The best way to get up and down is a retractable rope ladder. If you're being pursued by a large climbing woodland creature, you can run up your ladder and gather it as you go."

3

Get cooking

"You need a reliable gas camping stove to make tea, hot toddies and toast. Sometimes you'll need to be inventive and eat weird shit, like bugs. Aside from your stove's minimal carbon output, the only harmful substance you'll put out is methane—from your arse. For going to the bathroom, build a latrine on the ground nearby or use a bedpan."

4

Embrace hippiedom

"Successful tree dwellers wear outrageously crusty hippie clothes. Gentlemen shouldn't sleep naked—you don't want the early bird to catch the worm! Also, show unconditional respect for the tree. You can't bad-mouth it. If it starts oozing sticky stuff, you have to say, 'I'm going to have to deal with that. I'm a guest of the tree.'"

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Pop-Star Must-Have

PARTY MOMS

These cougars can take their celeb kids to the ER and the club



LESLEY PANETTIERE



DINA LOHAN



TISH CYRUS



KATHY HILTON

OBITS

Tony Wilson
57, August 10, in Manchester, England, of complications from kidney cancer. Music impresario who lorded over the Manchester rock scene, managing Joy Division, New Order and Happy Mondays. Wilson also co-founded Factory Records and the city's legendary Hacienda nightclub. Comedian Steve Coogan portrayed Wilson in the 2002 film *24 Hour Party People*.

Lee Hazlewood
78, August 4, in Henderson, Nevada, of cancer. Sixties songwriter and producer, best known for Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'." He also produced Nancy and Frank Sinatra's "Somethin' Stupid" and sang several duets with Nancy. Hazlewood worked with Duane Eddy and an early band of Gram Parsons's before launching a solo career that has been championed by a new generation of hipsters, including Nick Cave, Primal Scream and Sonic Youth's Steve Shelley.

WORD!



"THEIR MUSIC IS A MOUNTAIN OF CRAP."

Iggy Pop on the **Black Eyed Peas**



Method Man and RZA ordering munchies.

In the Studio

"THIS IS WHAT WE DO"

For Wu-Tang Clan's fifth studio album, **RZA** stuck to a grueling regimen of a pound of weed per week

"This album is like: *Fuck you, motherfucker. This is what we do*," says Wu-Tang Clan producer RZA, about *The 8 Diagrams*, their first album since the death of member Ol' Dirty Bastard. It's been 14 years since their debut, *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*—with its spare production, off-kilter rhymes and obscure martial-arts-film samples—was heralded a classic, and the Clan are content to stick with what they know. "Some people like brown weed and some people like green weed," RZA says cryptically, seated at Legacy Recording Studios in New York. "If you like brown weed and I got green weed, you can't come to my spot to get the brown weed. But if you come to my spot, I know what you're looking for—you're looking for green weed."

In between puffs (they smoked "a pound of weed in seven or eight days"), the eight-man crew completed a slew of tracks. Standouts include the anthemic "Weak Spot," which has "the same aura" as Wu touchstone "Bring da Ruckus," and "Half a Billion," a "super hard" Wu banger. Another is based on the Beatles classic "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," with Chili Pepper John Frusciante and George Harrison's son Dhani both adding guitar. "And Raekwon sings about a lady shooting dope in her titty—that's how some fiends do it!" *Ryan Dombal*

ALL ABOUT OUR ALBUM

Producer **RZA**
Studio Legacy Recording Studios, New York
Last album *Iron Flag* (2001)
New album *The 8 Diagrams*, due November 13

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

New Orleans rapper **Juvenile** is working on *Diary of a Soulja*, with help from Mannie Fresh and appearances by Akon and T-Pain, due spring 2008.

Southern rockers **Drive-By Truckers** are recording their eighth album (and first without guitarist Jason Isbell) in Athens, Georgia, due early 2008.



Pop singer **Gavin DeGraw** is recording the follow-up to 2003's *Chariot*, with producer Howard Benson (MCR, Daughtry), due early 2008.

PANETTIERE: JUAN RICO/FAME PICTURES; LOHAN: JAMES DEVANY/WIREIMAGE; CYRUS: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE; HILTON: MFLA/SLASH NEWS; WU-TANG CLAN: EWA RIES; DEGRAW: BENNETT HAGLIN/WIREIMAGE; POP: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE

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THE 33 MOST WANTED SONGS IN AMERICA

Pop & B hotties out-number brokenhearted rockers three to two in this month's Top 5



5

NICOLE SCHERZINGER "WHATEVER U LIKE"

HER NAME IS NICOLE

On this Polow da Don heat-rocker, the ethnically ambiguous Pussycat Doll beauty vows to cater to her man's every whim and fantasy. Personally, we'd ask for sandwiches—but if seeing a hot girl writhe around in the mud is more your speed, check the video, currently in rotation on MTV.

HOW WE DID IT

aolmusic.com

The Most Wanted Songs chart is based on the number of audience searches, downloads and video plays on AOLmusic.com.

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"DON'T STOP THE MUSIC"	RIHANNA	GOOD GIRL GONE BAD DEF JAM
2	"THE WAY I ARE"	TIMBALAND FEAT. KERI HILSON	SHOCK VALUE BLACKGROUND/INTERSCOPE
3	"WAKE UP CALL"	MAROON 5	IT WON'T BE SOON BEFORE LONG OCTONE/A&M
4	"OVER YOU"	DAUGHTRY	DAUGHTRY 19/RCA
5	"WHATEVER U LIKE"	NICOLE SCHERZINGER FEAT. T.I.	HER NAME IS NICOLE INTERSCOPE
6	"BARTENDER"	T-PAIN FEAT. AKON	EPIPHANY JIVE
7	"I GOT IT FROM MY MAMA"	WILL.I.AM	SONGS ABOUT GIRLS WILL.I.AM MUSIC/INTERSCOPE
8	"SO SMALL"	CARRIE UNDERWOOD	ARISTA NASHVILLE
9	"AYO TECHNOLOGY"	50 CENT FEAT. JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE & TIMBALAND	CURTIS SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
10	"STRONGER"	KANYE WEST	GRADUATION DEF JAM/RDC-A-FELLA
11	"DO IT WELL"	JENNIFER LOPEZ	BRAVE EPIC
12	"HOW FAR WE'VE COME"	MATCHBOX TWENTY	EXILE ON MAINSTREAM ATLANTIC
13	"INCONSOLEABLE"	BACKSTREET BOYS	JIVE
14	"SHAWTY"	PLIES FEAT. T-PAIN	THE REAL TESTAMENT SLIP-N-SLIDE/ATLANTIC
15	"WAIT FOR YOU"	ELLIOTT YAMIN	ELLIOTT YAMIN HICKORY
16	"HIP HOP POLICE"	CHAMILLIONAIRE FEAT. SLICK RICK	ULTIMATE VICTORY UNIVERSAL MOTOWN
17	"ME LOVE"	SEAN KINGSTON	SEAN KINGSTON BELUGA HEIGHTS/EPIC
18	"LOVESTONED"	JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE	FUTURESEX/LOVESOUNDS JIVE
19	"GIVE IT TO YOU"	EVE FEAT. SEAN PAUL	HERE I AM AFTERMATH/FULL SURFACE/GEFFEN
20	"TEARS DRY ON THEIR OWN"	AMY WINEHOUSE	BACK TO BLACK UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC
21	"WHO'S YOUR DADDY"	DADDY YANKEE	EL CARTEL: THE BIG BOSS EL CARTEL/INTERSCOPE
22	"TAKE ME THERE"	RASCAL FLATTS	STILL FEELS GOOD LYRIC STREET
23	"A BAY BAY"	HURRICANE CHRIS	51/50 RATCHET PGLD GROUNDS/J
24	"SWEETEST GIRL (DOLLAR BILL)"	WYCLEF JEAN FEAT. AKON, LIL WAYNE AND NIA	CARNIVAL II COLUMBIA
25	"TIME AFTER TIME"	QUIETDRIVE	WHEN ALL THAT'S LEFT IS YOU EPIC
26	"LET ME IN"	HOT HOT HEAT	HAPPINESS LTD. SIRE
27	"WALL TO WALL"	CHRIS BROWN	EXCLUSIVE JIVE
28	"BEAUTIFUL GIRLS"	SEAN KINGSTON	SEAN KINGSTON BELUGA HEIGHTS/EPIC
29	"BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY"	FERGIE	THE DUTCHESS INTERSCOPE
30	"PARALYZER"	FINGER ELEVEN	THEM VS. YOU VS. ME WIND-UP
31	"LIGHT UP THE SKY"	YELLOWCARD	PAPER WALLS CAPITOL
32	"HEY THERE DELILAH"	PLAIN WHITE T'S	EVERY SECOND COUNTS HOLLYWOOD
33	"EASY"	PAULA DEANDA FEAT. BOW WOW	PAULA DEANDA J

WEEK ENDING // SEPTEMBER 2, 2007



11

JENNIFER LOPEZ "DO IT WELL"

BRAVE

Jenny is back with a funk-spllosion about a man who knows how to push her buttons. Catch her and husband Marc Anthony (or, as we like to call them, Jennifarc) on tour from Atlantic City to Anaheim, or at your local discount cinema in *El Cantante*.



17

SEAN KINGSTON "ME LOVE"

SEAN KINGSTON

He sampled "Stand by Me" for the suicidal summer jam "Beautiful Girls." Now the 17-year-old Jamaican one-ups himself, jacking from Led Zep-pelin ("D'yer Mak'er") and UB40 ("Red, Red Wine"). See who else he borrows from at his Puyallup, Washington, show this month.



21

DADDY YANKEE "WHO'S YOUR DADDY"

EL CARTEL: THE BIG BOSS

This reggaeton don made his name asking women to guzzle his *gasolina*. Now he's asking *mamis* who their *papis* are—then answering that he is, in fact, their *papi*. He contemplates matters of paternity this month in Tucson, Vegas ... and Tijuana!

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GET YOURS

INSIDER

KNOWING STUFF IS GOOD



Daughtry

Each month, one lucky rock star phones *Blender* HQ every day for a week, just to, you know, share. Now on the line: Grunge-rockin' *Idol* alum **CHRIS DAUGHTRY**

Day 1

AUGUST 4, 4:02 P.M.

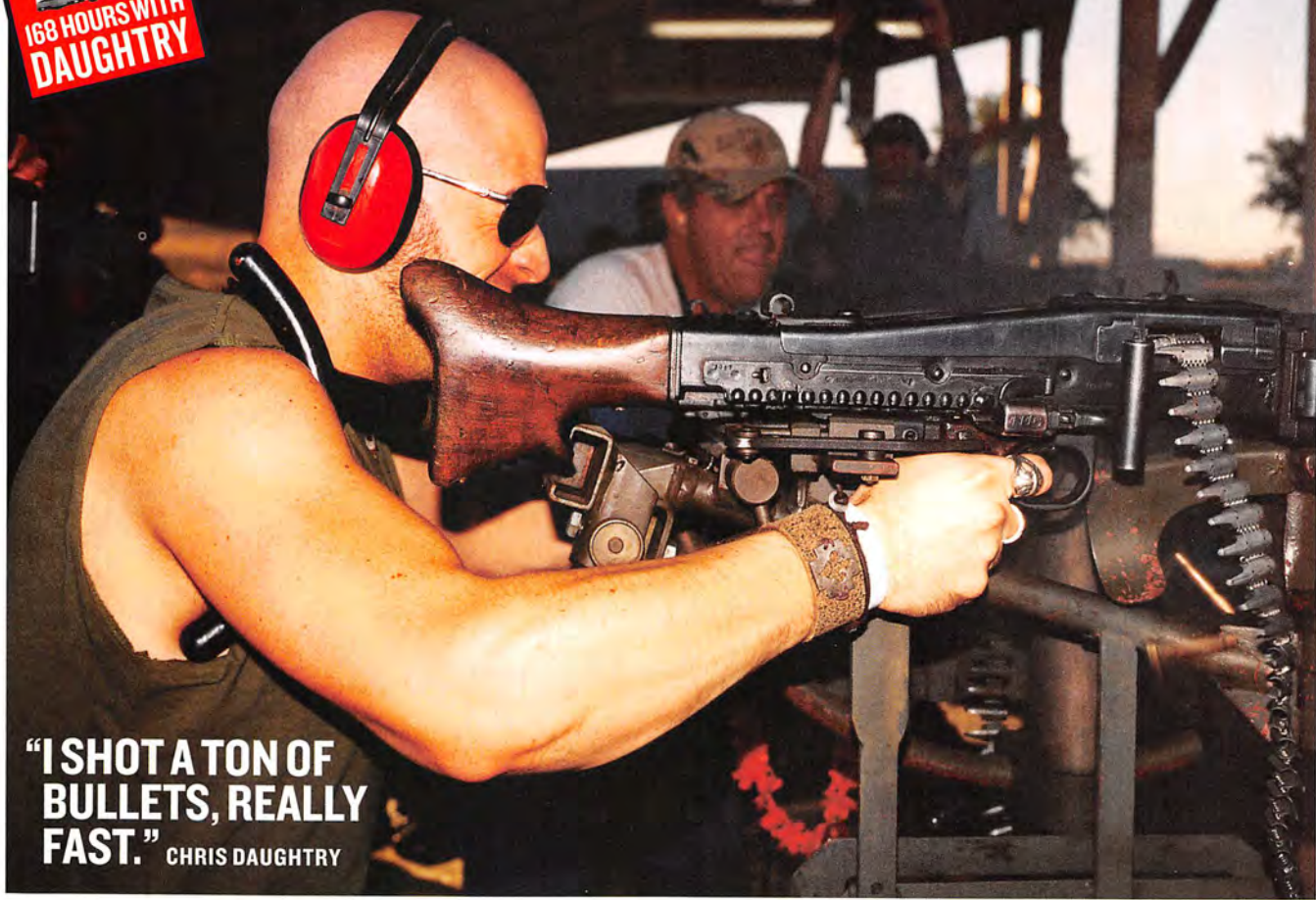
In the midst of a string of headlining gigs, Chris Daughtry phones from Biloxi, Mississippi's Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. The day before was the band's first day off in a week.

"Most days off are pretty boring, but we had a good one yesterday. We partied and gambled at the Hard Rock, and they kept giving us free drinks. Blackjack's my game, but I'm not that savvy. I broke even, because my tour manager was whispering in my ear, telling me when to bail. So that kept me up till about 4:30 A.M. That's my typical bedtime, but we're pretty tame guys. I usually opt for a beer >>



BLUNT: CHRIS BUCK

168 HOURS WITH DAUGHTRY



"I SHOT A TON OF BULLETS, REALLY FAST." CHRIS DAUGHTRY

and a Gatorade. I gotta save my voice, you know? Normally, we just watch TV on the bus. We've got the flat screens, the whole setup. It's pretty sweet, but of course it's a bunch of dudes, so it smells like ass and feet, there's crap everywhere—you get up in the middle of the night to take a piss, trip on some shoes and totally eat it. Last night was 100 percent injury-free, though!"

Day 2

AUGUST 5, 4:45 P.M.

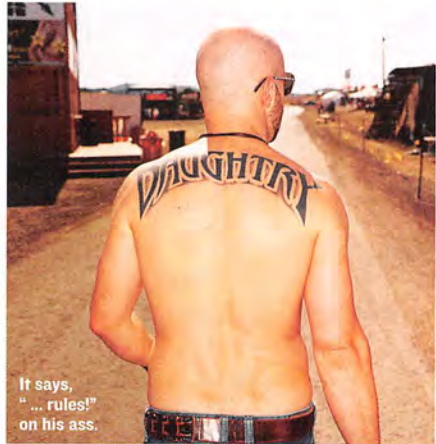
Daughtry calls from Montgomery, Alabama. He doesn't sound too good.

"The concert went great last night, but I'm not feeling well, man. After the show, I skipped the beer, and had some Gatorade and a Nyquil. My glands are swollen and whatnot. Gotta get some antibiotics. I do 15 minutes of light vocal warm-ups before every show. They're pretty easy to make fun of. I start with this lip-flapping thing [blows raspberries up and down the scale at a very loud volume] and end with this *ahhhh! ah-hhhhh! ahhh!* mating call. Even worse is the monkey face I make when I'm doing it.

"Right now I'm looking at water; I don't know if it's a lake or what. It's like 110 degrees out, but we're gonna try and do some fishing in a bit. We just sent out for poles." >>



All for one: The band backstage in Sturgis, South Dakota.



It says, "... rules!" on his ass.



The road manager is getting a bonus tonight.



Bands that wrestle together stay together.

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Day 3

AUGUST 6, 2:34 P.M.

En route to Little Rock, Arkansas, Daughtry checks in.

"Well, the poles never showed up. And after the show, we saw the most massive catfish skimming the water. [Sighs.] Oh well.

"We've been doing some dates with Nickelback on this tour. We're on our own now, but we're getting back with them in a few days. They're great. I just write whatever comes to me, but you can tell that they sit around for months just coming up with the wittiest, most thought-out things.

"They fire off T-shirt cannons every night, and we're the ones that shoot them into the crowd. There are always people in the front row like, 'Me! Me!' and it's like, 'You're six feet away. I can't fire this at you. It'll smash your face, buddy!'"

Day 4

AUGUST 7, 2:58 P.M.

Daughtry hollers from his bus, stationed in front of a Little Rock Toys 'R' Us.

"It's another day off, and here's the plan: I'm gonna sit on my ass for a long time. Get

back to people I've been ignoring for the past week. I'm sure my family and friends think I'm the biggest jerk. My wife and I have been married seven years. I call home every day—I gotta make sure the kids still recognize my voice. My son's been going to a science camp this summer. Or something. That's the kind of thing I get wrong. There's a Toys 'R' Us in the same parking lot as our hotel, so I'm gonna go get some presents for the kids later on.

"Also, I've been pretty lazy about shaving my head—you can actually see my whole hairline—so the razor's coming out tonight. No hand touches my head but mine. I do my own facial hair, and if I choose to wear eyeliner, I do that, too. I got my own little makeup in my own little man-purse. I'll admit it: I own a man-purse."

Day 5

AUGUST 8, 2:40 P.M.

On a stretch of highway between Arkansas and South Dakota, Daughtry rings.

"Our fridge is looking pretty gnarly. We need some cleanup in here. The door is full of Red Bull, mayonnaise and mustard. Inside there's Gatorades, sandwich meat and a take-out box that we've been

scared to open for weeks. Coulda come from T.G.I. Friday's, but I'm not opening it up. In the freezer there are Hot Pockets calzones. That's my poison, every night.

"I didn't make it to Toys 'R' Us, but I did head over to the mall. I was shopping for clothes at Buckle, and next thing I knew there were hundreds of people asking me for pictures. It's weird when strangers come up, looking at you like they've known you forever. I'm grateful, but when they know your daughter's birthday and say they wanna get her a present, it gets creepy. The craziest thing is when people ask me to sign a body part, and then they show up at another show and they've had it tattooed on to them. I'm like, 'This is permanent! What are you gonna do when I suck in two years?'"

Day 6

AUGUST 9, 2:31 P.M.

Daughtry calls from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, amid peals of laughter.

"I'm sorry, we're watching *Chappelle's Show*, the sketch about a family with an interesting last name that I'm not allowed to say. Some people get offended by Chappelle, but I think he just says what

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Kenna
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Hey Hey My My Yo Yo



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Mark Ronson
Version



A Fine Frenzy
One Call In The Sea



Ben Jelen
Ex-Sensitive



Sean Kingston
Sean Kingston



Emerson Hart
Cigarettes & Gasoline

*Dates subject to change.

everyone's thinking. He's a genius.

"I got to meet him last year. He was real mellow. Like, having-a-good-time mellow. He did a surprise set at the Laugh Factory, and my friend Dane Cook tipped me off. I've known Dane since I was in L.A. doing *Idol*. I was out at Hyde one night and he came up to me like, 'I'm a huge fan'—this was when I was still on the show. I couldn't believe it.

"So, yeah, yesterday we stocked up on entertainment. Went to FYE, got a bunch of Chappelle DVDs and a PlayStation 3 for the bus. Finally! Just trying to get away from the monotony."

Day 7

AUGUST 10, 3:33 P.M.

Ensnared in the climate-controlled back room of his bus, Daughtry dials in one last time.

"Dude! We're in Sturgis, and it's 200 degrees outside. We're playing at this huge bike-rally thing tonight. There's a massive shooting range, with every gun you can think of: AK-47s, M16s. It seemed like a fun thing to try, so we did. The coolest thing I shot was this World War II anti-aircraft gun. It had two barrels and sat on this crazy contraption. I



shot a ton of bullets, really fast.

"The crowd was crazy last night. Somebody launched a Red Bull can at me, but it missed. I saw it fly past my head and slide under the drum kit. I wanted to say, 'Missed me!'—but then all the other dick-

heads would start winging stuff. I've learned to control myself. Don't get me wrong, though, if a situation arises, I can handle myself. I just hope dudes don't read this and make a run at me now. If so, I promise I'll call you from the hospital." [BLENDER]

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JAMES BLUNT

THE SOFT-ROCK CROONER AND SUPERMODEL ARM
CANDY ON CRYING, DRESSING IN LADIES' CLOTHING AND BEING
(LIKE) A TOMATO-AND-BACON SANDWICH

By VICTORIA DE SILVERIO

Photograph by CHRIS BUCK

JAMES BLUNT—FORMER British soldier, current civilian superstar—says he comes from “a long line of warriors, from a family that’s served in one kind of army or another since 995 A.D.” As the legend goes, in 1999, Capt. Blunt strapped a guitar onto his tank and led a column of 30,000 peacekeeping troops into Kosovo. Blunt has saved lives. He knows how to fly a plane. Befitting a man of his virility, he lives on the jet-set island paradise of Ibiza, Spain, dates supermodels (most famously, Petra Nemcova) and has fuck-you money.

So why, on a perfectly sunny day in New York, with all his brawn and flash, is Blunt so afraid to pose with a blow-up doll? The mere sight of the inflatable female, floating upon the optimistic shoulders of the *Blender* photographer, draws shudders from the 33-year-old singer. “No,” he says, politely but firmly, “I will not pose with a blow-up doll.”

Blunt doesn’t do silly (at least not professionally), but he does have a sense of humor, which is helpful, since he seems to be a magnet for dubious achievement honors. Recently in the U.K., his wispy “You’re Beautiful,” from the smash 2004 debut *Back to Bedlam*, was voted “The Most Irritating Song of All Time” (edging out “Axel F” by Crazy Frog) in an online poll; his elegiac “Goodbye My Lover” is the most requested funeral song in the U.K.; and Blunt was ranked by his fellow countrymen as the fourth “Most Annoying Thing” in Britain, topped only by cold-callers, caravans and line-jumpers. “My new songs are much more fun, more lively,” he says dryly, referring to his latest record, the ’70s pop-inspired *All the Lost Souls*.

Jetlagged and nursing a slight hangover, he grabs a glass of cola and his Bono sunglasses and sits *Blender* down in a cozy corner. “OK, what do you have for me ...”



Blunt takes his
fear of toilet-seat
germs a little
too far.



Are you a crier?

SpielvogelR, Tampa, FL

No, I'm not. I'm a British man, and we don't cry. I'm actually emotionless. But seriously, I don't remember the last time. Why would I cry? I have no need to. At this stage in my life, there's been no great personal turmoil for me. Sometimes people cry at my concerts—when I performed on *Oprah*, she provided tissues under every chair—but I try to tell them to get a grip.

Besides your fame and wealth, what is it about you that attracts the supermodels?

Ms.Mango86, Fallon, NV

Nothing else. It really is the fame and fortune. I tried many other things. For example: I was in the army; I had a huge motorbike. I was desperately trying to impress people. All of that failed, and now I rely on my fame and fortune.

Your music is real sensitive, but you seem like a party animal. Are you?

B_Spokler, Oshkosh, WI

I'm a human, and as a human, I'm pretty flexible. The most amazing thing about the media is that they pigeonhole you into being just one thing. In my music, I draw on the ups and the downs, the good and the bad, in my life.

Do you ever drink and write sappy love songs?

C.kmark2420, Washington, D.C.

Isn't that illegal? No, I've never done that in my life. I'm too busy on the table, taking my clothes off and dancing.

You wrote part of your first record in the army—where did you write this one?

bowsrboi, New Albany, IN

In Ibiza, which is a big party island outside of Spain. These new songs are much more fun than the old ones. During the summer, we would go clubbing till nine in the morning, and I'd write songs during the day.

If you were a food product, what would it be? And what does that say about you?

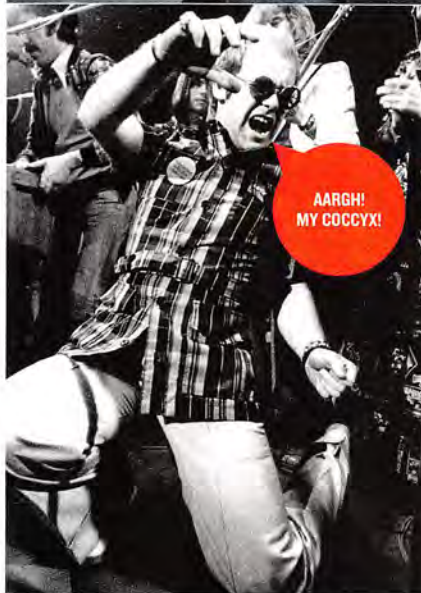
Retroecho, Roanoke, AL

I'd probably just be a sandwich. A simple bacon-and-tomato sandwich—something that provides sustenance. I'm not very refined or very fancy. I don't travel with an entourage. People always come up to me in airports and say, "Why are you alone?"

What do you talk to your friend Diddy about—does he give you fashion tips?

Carrie.Reade, Beacon, NY

We talk about politics, books, old record collections and girls, but mostly we go



clubbing. As you can tell, I don't have very much style, so I think I'm a lost cause in that department.

What's the most ridiculously romantic thing you've ever done?

chirpBoy4, Norcross, GA

Last Valentine's Day, I had a helicopter fly over my then-girlfriend's house in Britain, throwing out 100,000 rose petals. Then I took her up into the helicopter and we flew to Paris for the day. It was a complete surprise to her.

Are you still in boot-camp shape?

ufo4life4u, Tacoma, WA

Definitely not. I've never really gone to the gym—I'm not very keen on exercise bikes—and being on the road for two and a half years takes its toll. If I went to boot camp now, I guess I'd be able to catch up. After a

while you get to enjoy the beatings because you're doing it with a group of people, you find the humor in it. And if you're running up and down a few mountains and you haven't slept in weeks and you're soaking wet, you'll eventually get the giggles. You're actually starving your brain of oxygen. Sometimes I started to hallucinate that this guy—who looked a bit peculiar and evil—would follow me around. We'd just have a conversation, like, "Hey, how you doing?"

"You're Beautiful" was just voted the most irritating song ever. In your mind, what's the second-most irritating song?

K.Ellingreese, Grand Forks, ND

That's the thing about competitions, you never remember No. 2. I would hate to come second or third. I'm very grateful for having such an accolade bestowed upon me.



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Do you ever make up different lyrics to "You're Beautiful," just for fun?

Dreamsler45, Aurora, CO

I do, but I really can't say what they are, or I'd be crucified. They're not nice. But there are a number of parodies out there: Weird Al did "You're Pitiful," which was a great honor; there's also one called "It's Bloody Cold"; and one called "My Cubicle," about an office worker. But my favorite is by an Australian comedian named Tom Gleeson. He plays the song and then talks over the top of it, from the perspective of the girl's boyfriend—he doesn't like her having a rapport with James Blunt, the weird stalker pervert.

You are British. Do you dress in women's clothing?

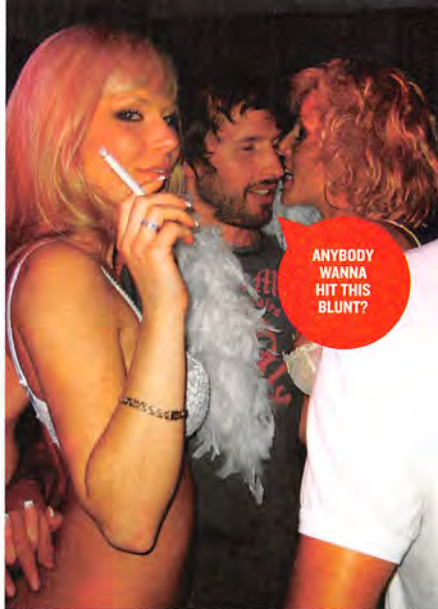
JHanson, Newark, NJ

Yes. All British people are cross-dressers. But it's all for humor, not eroticism.

Have you ever had a real job—other than army officer and rock star?

HellsYeah303, Panama City, FL

When I was 17 or 18, I was an odd-job man. I had to strip a field of ragwort, a plant that horses can't eat. You have to do it by hand, so imagine a whole field of this stuff! I was also a gardener.



Have you ever been arrested?

FFrank56, Hilton Head Island, SC

Not by civilian police, but in the army I was arrested because I was late. I got locked up, too. That's why my ambition now is to be the most punctual man in rock & roll.

What is one thing you suck at?

BatsBatsBats, Dallas

The other day, after one of my concerts, someone told me that I couldn't dance.

Have you always sounded like a girl when you sing?

CatsRPeople, Walnut Creek, CA

In the morning, I sound like a man! I record vocals at night, so maybe I should start doing them in the morning.

What year was the best for music?

PaxJones, Austin, TX

The early '70s are my favorite, with singer-songwriters like Cat Stevens, Elton John and Lou Reed. They were all having so much fun. And it was all about live music, as well—real bands playing. For this new album, we tried to lock into that, playing live in the studio. You can hear it, too; it sounds like an old-fashioned record. I've got a song called "1973," which is influenced by Fleetwood Mac, Steely Dan, David Bowie and Led Zeppelin. My first album was pretty naive, as I hadn't listened to much music, just the Beach Boys and the Beatles, really.

You performed at Elton John's wedding—what did you get him for a present?

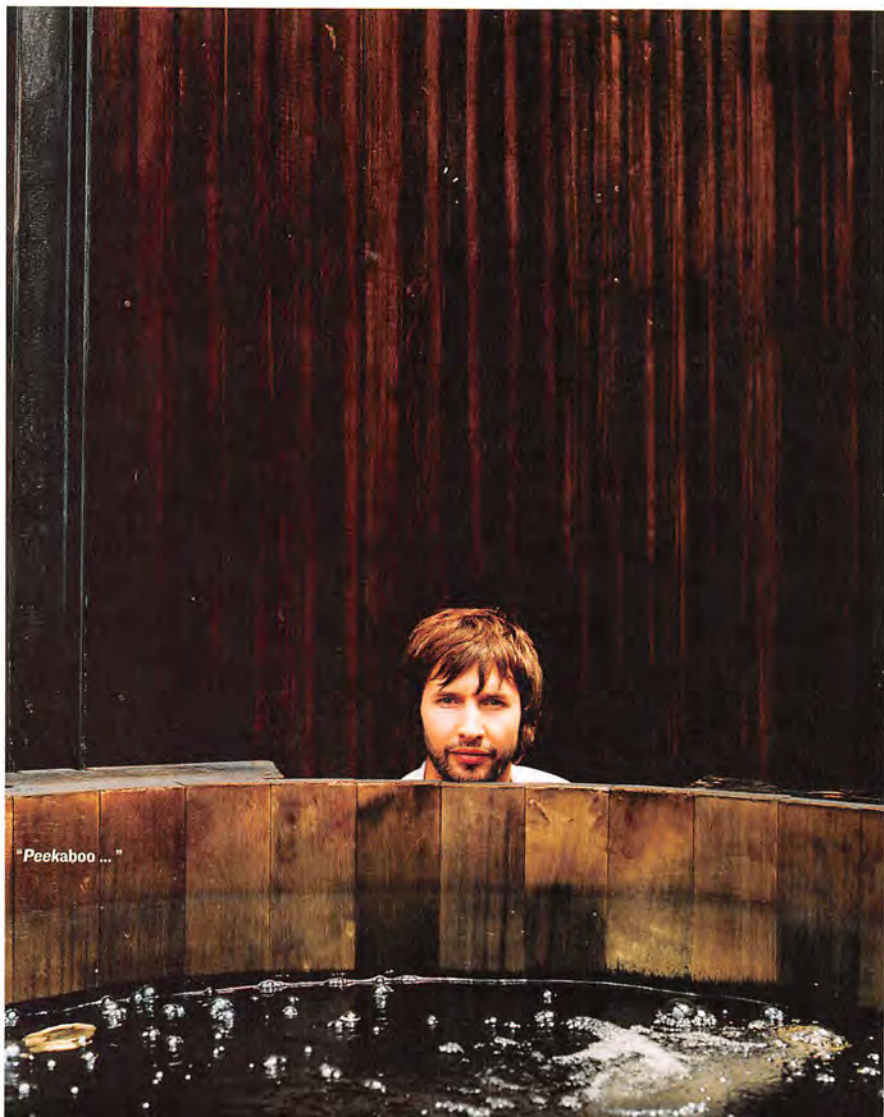
IIZHUNGRY, Wilmington, DE

I gave him my guitarist. It's been two years and I haven't seen him since! Elton doesn't get typical presents, so I have to give him something special.

How do you think you're going to die?

strokes_amy91, Sherman Oaks, CA

I'm going to die of a heart attack, but not before this interview. I'm definitely going to get through this. [BLENDER]



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CELEBRITY VIBE; LISA O'CONNOR/ZUMA PRESS; CHRIS BUCK.



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THE GREATEST SONGS EVER

The Stories Behind the Finest Tunes in History

INSIDER

IN 1996, TEDDY Riley found himself in an unfamiliar situation: a slump. The 29-year-old singer-producer had a bulletproof resume. He'd pioneered New Jack Swing, the steamy marriage of lover-man soul and hip-hop swagger that became the sound of late-'80s urban radio. He'd topped the R&B charts with his leather-blazer-sporting trio, Guy; and, in 1991, he produced Michael Jackson's *Dangerous*, which would sell roughly 30 million copies worldwide.

But as the decade wore on, Riley fell out of step. New Jack Swing had grown passé, and gangsta rap's hardened urgency had commandeered the hip-hop mainstream. His latest R&B group, Blackstreet, was a revolving door of disgruntled vocalists, and Riley—the group's lead singer—was hungry to redefine himself. "I wanted to make a different sound," he tells *Blender*. "I was callin' it Heavy R&B." Riley and the group decamped from their Virginia Beach base to Trinidad to work on their second album. They returned with a dozen or so songs. "But I was like, 'Man, we ain't finished,'" Riley recalls. "This is how you make an album: You make a bunch of good songs, then you make that *last* track,

the one that really takes you there."

One day soon after, Riley heard Bill Withers's forgotten '70s R&B gem "Grandma's Hands," an acoustic eulogy for Withers's grandmother. Riley instantly latched onto the opening, hymnlike groan. "It's only one bar," he notes. "But I said, 'That's a groove people are gonna go crazy over.'"

Riley sped up the bar, flipping its mournfulness into a jubilant strut. He completed his track within hours, banging out a juke-joint piano lick to accompany the sample while singing a chorus that popped into his head: "I like the way you work it/No diggity/I got to bag it up."

The result is a monument to a curvy

femme fatale who gives her heart to no one and who'll take money from any Casanova who can afford her expensive tastes. The heroine—whom Riley lovingly dubbed a "playette"—slinks through the song unattainably, reducing suitors to quivering pools of hair gel. "It's about a girl who works her swagger," Riley says. "Like, the flyest girl ever."

Practically feminist by hip-hop's ho's-and-gold-diggers standards, "No Diggity" was met with instant skepticism within the group. "They thought it was the corniest thing," Riley says, laughing.

Undeterred, he got Dr. Dre to contribute a burly opening verse, and Riley's then-protégée Queen Pen closed the song out from the playette's perspective. The result brilliantly combines thug bravado with New Jack-styled *sprechgesang* and the velvety vocal choruses of old-school R&B—a hat trick hip-hop has been attempting ever since.

As the first single off *Another Level*, "No Diggity" deposed "Macarena" from its three-and-a-half-month stranglehold in the No. 1 pop spot. The triumphant comeback, though, was short-lived. Festering tensions within Blackstreet erupted into an ugly feud between Riley and longtime member Chauncey Hannibal, and subsequent albums couldn't produce a similar crossover juggernaut. Riley's collaborations with Michael Jackson were met with dwindling interest and sales. In 2002 Riley declared bankruptcy.

These days, the singer-producer is focused on the gospel scene, but his shadow still looms large over the pop airwaves. His onetime apprentices the Neptunes are among many producers who explore Riley's smooth/hard techniques and, from Akon to R. Kelly to T-Pain, any singer who glides back and forth across the rap/R&B divide owes him a significant debt. "You can play 'No Diggity' now and it still bumps in the club," Akon tells *Blender*. "Teddy Riley's a genius for that." [BLENDER]

OCTOBER
1996
11 YEARS
AGO THIS MONTH



Blackstreet wait around for Keanu Reeves.

BLACKSTREET

"NO DIGGITY"

How a shimmying salute to "the flyest girl ever" earned the King of New Jack Swing a second act (By TIM GRIERSON)

Vital Statistics

- SONG** "No Diggity"
- ARTIST** Blackstreet
- LABEL** Interscope
- PERFORMERS** Teddy Riley (vocals, various instruments), Chauncey Hannibal (vocals), Mark Middleton (vocals), Eric Williams (vocals), Dr. Dre (vocals), Queen Pen (vocals), William "Skylz" Stewart (various instruments)
- WRITERS** Riley, Hannibal, Lynise Walters, Stewart, Dr. Dre
- PRODUCERS** Riley, Stewart
- CHART DEBUT** October 12, 1996
- HIGHEST CHART POSITION** 1

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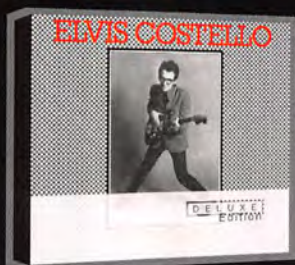
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"People really seemed to dig what we're about," added guitarist Steve Anthony. For those of us who weren't there to catch the shows, the band is about no frills, original rock music. For more information on Kalifornium and General Tire, visit TakeItToTheMax.com.

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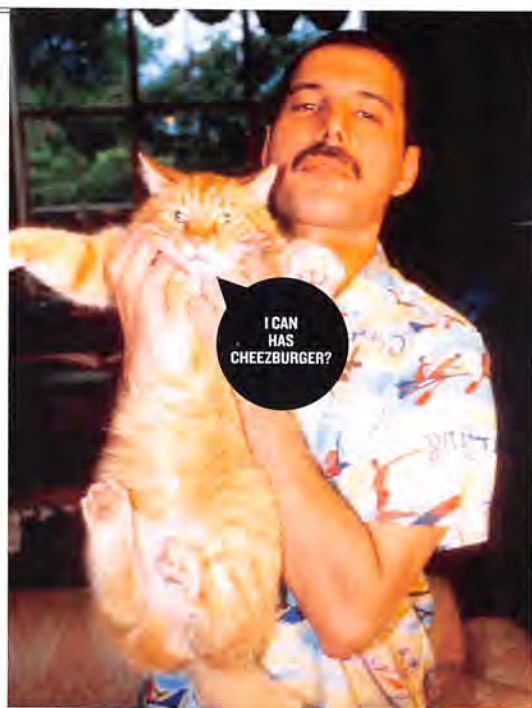
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I know Queen's Freddie Mercury was a huge cat lover. How many did he own during his life? What's the most he had at one time?

Elaine Shardot, Houston

According to a 2003 article in *Cat Fancy* magazine, Mercury adopted lots of cats throughout his life, at one point owning as many as 10. He dedicated his first solo album, *Mr. Bad Guy*, to four of them, as well as to "all the cat lovers across the universe—screw everybody else." In one of Queen's videos he wore a vest adorned with portraits of several of his cats, painted by Mercury himself. Sometimes while on tour, he'd even call home to chat with his cats, often at exorbitant international rates.

We know a few of the cats' names: Oscar, Tiffany, Goliath, Miko, Romeo, Lily, Tom, Jerry. But his favorite by far was Delilah, a chubby, tri-colored tabby. Mercury dedicated a song on Queen's *Innuendo* to the plump puss ("I love you, Delilah/Oh, you make me so very happy/You give me kisses and I go out of my mind/Meow, meow, meow, meow"), and she stayed with him literally until the end, curled up beside Mercury when he died of complications from AIDS in 1991.

I heard something about a fistfight between Chrissie Hynde and Carly Simon. For real?

Kevin McFadden, Gloucester, MA

Not only is it for real ... it happened at a Joni Mitchell show!

It was the night of November 7, 1995—Mitchell's 52nd birthday. The genteel folk rocker was playing a celebratory show at a tiny New York club. Among the audience members were Hynde, Simon and fellow astro-rocker Natalie Merchant. Things were going fine until about halfway through the 90-minute set, when, midsong, Hynde started clapping and shouting, "I love you, I love you!"

Simon, seated one booth over, asked the Pretenders frontwoman if she maybe, possibly, wouldn't mind keeping it down. Accounts differ as to what

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happened next. Some eyewitnesses said Hynde—who may or may not have been drunk—grabbed Simon around the neck and started punching her; a publicist, meanwhile, said, "[Hynde] was just hugging her." Simon, for her part, described it as "choking me in a loving way" and "choking me in 'fun intoxication.'" Sounds like a catfight even Freddie Mercury would love.

On the back of Pink Floyd's Ummagumma is a picture of two guys with all the band's equipment. At the time, rumor had it they stole Pink Floyd's van, took a photo of themselves with the gear and demanded the band put it on their next cover. True?

T. Huckoby, Tennessee Colony, TX

It's a great story, but alas, the truth is far less felonious. The supposed gear-nappers are actually just two of Pink Floyd's roadies, Alan Stiles and Pete Watts. They posed for the photo at England's Biggin Hill airport during the band's 1969 tour.

There are, however, a couple of interesting footnotes here. Both men went on to make cameos on Pink Floyd albums: Stiles's voice appears on a 1970 song called "Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast," and Watts lent his maniacal laugh to two songs on *Dark Side of the Moon*. But Watts's most famous contribution to pop culture came in the form of his daughter, the actress Naomi Watts.

With all this talk about the record industry's slump, I was wondering: How many CDs are sold every year? How many are released?

Caitlin Raigosa, Portland, OR

According to Nielsen SoundScan, last year music retailers sold approximately 553 million CDs—almost two for every person in the U.S. That may seem like a lot, but it's almost 50 million less than 2005, a drop of around 8 percent. And it pales in comparison to the boom year of 2000, when blockbuster albums by Britney Spears, 'N Sync, Eminem, Linkin Park and the

Backstreet Boys propelled total sales to an all-time high of nearly 710 million—a whopping 30 percent more than last year.

But surprisingly, while CD sales are in a nose-dive, the number of bands and artists releasing CDs is

soaring higher than ever. Nielsen SoundScan reports that in 2006 over 50,000 CDs hit the marketplace. That's about a 50 percent jump from seven years ago—or almost a thousand CDs every week. Coupled with the dip at the checkout lines, this increased competition means it's tougher and tougher for musicians to make a living from record sales. Bad news for rockers hoping to strike it rich ... but very good news for the ramen industry.



Hynde (right), unmoved by Simon's pre-bout mind games.



Gear, gear: The back cover of Ummagumma.

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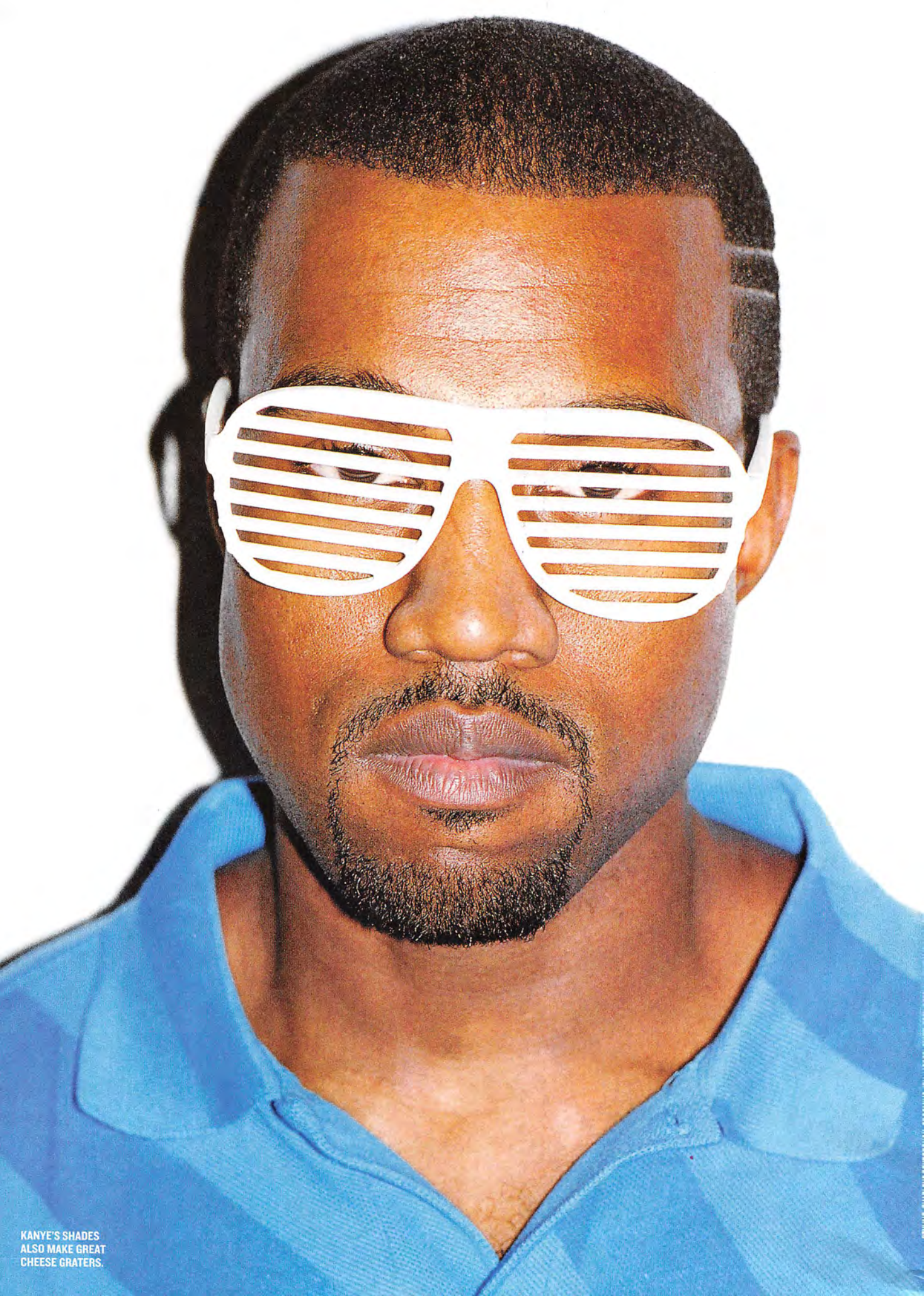
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WAY OUT WEST

KANYE WEST SPENT HIS LIFE STRUGGLING FOR THE RESPECT OF HIS HIP-HOP PEERS. NOW HE TELLS *BLENDER* THE GENRE CAN'T CONTAIN HIM: "I WANT TO BE THE NO. 1 ARTIST IN THE WORLD"

By **JODY ROSEN** Photographs by **TERRY RICHARDSON**



IT'S OFFICIAL: BRIGHT-YELLOW pantswear is a fashion don't. Kanye West learns this immutable sartorial law the hard way, when he saunters into a midtown-Manhattan recording studio sporting jeans (and matching Nikes) of a hue somewhere between Banana Breeze and Scalding Sunburst. "How does this look?" West asks the roomful of friends and associates. A long silence follows. Finally, one of West's backup singers speaks up: "Naw, man, that's the worst yet." "Damn!" says West, as everyone breaks into laughter.

It's a steamy Saturday in July, and West has already spent the better part of an hour trying to put together a suitable outfit for this evening's performance at Giants Stadium in New Jersey—the U.S. edition of Live Earth, Al Gore's six-continent-spanning environmental mega-concert. A certifiable dandy, West does not take such decisions lightly. "Clothes are my drug," he'll later say. "And I like to overdose." Popping into an adjacent room to try on ensembles for his dozen-strong entourage, West dismisses one look as "very hood—a.k.a. wack." There is an extended debate about which color combinations will stand out best against the backdrop of the Live Earth

stage: a garish grid of car tires inset with flashing lights. For a few minutes, West settles on white trousers topped by a white polo-style shirt with a multicolored-pinwheel design splashed across the chest. "This shirt is fresh," he crows. But then, doubts start creeping in. "The all-white, with the white Jordans, it's too Diddyish," he says. "Too St. Tropez." Back to the drawing board.

"It isn't always like this," West says, after finally choosing a pair of gray jeans, a red polo topped with a white jacket and blindingly white new high-tops. "But you know, it's a tough decision, what to wear on worldwide TV." And Kanye West has a reputation to uphold. "With me," >>

he adds, "people expect the unexpected."

Since first emerging from Chicago in the early part of this decade, West has maintained his status as one of popular music's most reliable iconoclasts, with a thriving side-business in provocation and scandal. In 2004, he graduated from behind-the-scenes beatmaker to full-fledged hip-hop auteur and soon thereafter was declaring himself a "legend," storming awards-show stages in indignation when denied prizes he knew were rightly his and posing for magazine covers costumed as Jesus Christ.

The bluster was extreme, but few could deny the powerful originality of his persona—and his music. He had a foot in both the earthy, boho-rap world of his Chicago homeboy Common and in the rarefied realm of the Moët-swilling hip-hop elite—but wanted membership in neither. At a time when most rappers dressed in thugged-out streetwear or—on those special red-carpet occasions—double-breasted Al Capone

"I LOVE THE KILLERS ... I LIKE KEANE—THEY'RE ONE OF MY FAVORITE GROUPS. AND MODEST MOUSE."

zoot suits, West was unabashedly metrosexual, nicknaming himself the "Louis Vuitton Don," arriving on stages clad in pastel polos, sweater vests and other garb straight outta cocktail hour at the Kennebunkport yacht club. His songs were similarly full of contradictions and cognitive dissonances, outrageous boasts that segued into harsh self-criticism, tussles for Kanye's soul that pit God against Mammon, lustful odes to diamond jewelry that veered into jeremiads about human-rights abuses in the global diamond trade.

It's music that was presumed to have no commercial potential—West had to convince his friend Jay-Z to give him a record deal—but *The College Dropout* (2004) and *Late Registration* (2005) wracked up multi-platinum sales. They also won Grammys (though not the ones West would have preferred), topped critics polls and established West as the kind of pop star who gets invited along with a cadre of A-list celebrities to appear on a network-television special in the wake of a national catastrophe. So it was that Americans tuning in to NBC's *A Concert for Hurricane Relief* on September 2, 2005, found themselves watching a 28-year-old rapper excoriate the president—"George Bush doesn't care about black people"—on live television. Apparently, NBC's upper brass missed the memo. *RE: Mr. Kanye West, expect the unexpected.*

Now, as West readies the release of his third album, *Graduation*, it's business as usual. Which is to say, it's unusual. "If I was trying to make an album that sounded exactly like *The College Dropout*, then I'd be dropping off into the nostalgia world," West says. "This album is going to challenge listeners." The first single, "Can't Tell Me Nothing," is a slow, brooding song powered by an eerie vocal sample that West describes, with a shake of his head, as "so different—kind of African, kind of digital-sounding." It's far from an obvious choice for a lead single, a fact that pleases West to no end. "I encountered some resistance from the record label, because I have some other songs that are much more digestible. But 'Can't Tell Me Nothing'—that shit just cuts my soul. I had to drop it first." And then there's the second single, "Stronger," an even bigger departure. A stormy dance track built around a robotic Daft Punk vocal loop and clobbering drums, it sounds more like big-beat electronica, or even rock, than hip-hop.

Which, apparently, is exactly the way West wants it. Ask him what music he's listening to these days, and you're left wondering if he's been spending quiet evenings at home in the glow of his laptop, surfing the dweebiest corners of the rock blogosphere. "I love the Killers ... I like Keane—they're one of my favorite groups. And Modest Mouse. I like how authentic that album sounded, like it was from the '60s." West got turned on to Daft Punk by his DJ, A-Trak ("A-Trak is definitely a music snob—he could be, like, a blogger or whatever").



YEAH, BABY! (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT): READY FOR THE COUNTRY CLUB WITH JAY-Z; FREAKING OUT MIKE MYERS AFTER KATRINA; LIL' YE, AGE 3; FLAUNTING X-RAY CHIC AT A PARIS FASHION SHOW.





"WHO WANTS FISH STICKS?"

And then there's West's prime source for un-stuntastic sounds. "VH1 put me up on the All-American Rejects. It put me up on Regina Spektor. It put me up on Feist."

The 2007 model Kanye West comes on like an indie-fied aesthete. He talks a blue streak about Takashi Murakami, the star Japanese pop artist West brought in to do a nerd-chic overhaul of the *Graduation* packaging. He raves about his forthcoming TV show, currently in preproduction, a classy "one-camera" sitcom on the ultimate high-middlebrow network, HBO. Go to West's Website, and the first thing you'll see *isn't* his big-budget Hype Williams-directed "Can't Tell Me Nothing" video, but the *Saturday Night Live*-style spoof, commissioned by West himself, in which indie comedian Zach Galifianakis and folk warbler Will Oldham lip-sync "Can't Tell Me Nothing" while romping around a North Carolina farm.

And then there are his musical excursions. That mix-tape freestyle, rap-sung to the tune of "Young Folks," the chirrupy hit by Stockholm indie-pop combo Peter Bjorn and John. Another mix-tape joint, "Us Placers," with West rhyming over a dour, nearly beatless loop from Thom Yorke's "The Eraser." That Fall Out Boy remix. "Homecoming," a track on the new album performed with Chris Martin. It's quite a list: quirky indie chanteuses; French elec-

tronica geeks; postrock eggheads. As you run down the discography, you find yourself thinking, *Maybe it's Kanye West who doesn't care about black people.*

Of course, West is merely following his muse, which these days is leading him in a direction he cheekily calls a "non-no-brainer." But West is determined to drag the world along with him. "See, I have a very clear goal," he says. "I want to be the worldwide top artist. You can quote that. I want to be the No. 1 artist in the world."

IF YOU'RE A

headliner at a concert whose purpose is to raise consciousness about global climate change, the politically correct move is not to roll up to the show in a vehicle the size of the Staten Island ferry. But when West ducks out of the recording studio with a Louis Vuitton duffel bag slung over his shoulder to head to Giants Stadium, he clambers into the backseat of a giant black SUV. He is the first person to admit, George Bush dissing aside, "I'm not very tuned in to politics. I apologize to people who expect me to act like I work at CNN."

As the car creeps downtown through Manhattan traffic, West sits back and talks,

occasionally craning his neck to assess the passing parade of New York women ("Whoa. Did you see her?"; "I'm sorry, but those are some terrible titties"). He ricochets from topic to topic, with a mix of braggadocio and modesty, cantankerousness and charm that is familiar from his songs. West is a jet-setter these days—"I spend half the year in New York, half in L.A., half overseas: the three halves"—and boldface names crop up frequently. "Harley, my trainer, he's Jessica Simpson's trainer, too. That's my whole stunt. If a girl comes around, she's like, 'You're with Jessica Simpson's trainer? Wow!'"

Ask West, 30, about his personal life—his engagement to his longtime girlfriend, fashion designer Alexis Phifer, or whether he plans to have children—and he gets testy. "Yes, I'm engaged. Yes, I plan to have kids. But I'm not gonna base the night that I conceive a child off of what I tell *Blender* magazine."

But when the talk turns to other topics—art, fashion and, especially, music—Kanye is irrepressible. He professes his passion for architecture and design, whipping out a digital camera to show *Blender* pictures of the renovations on his two homes, a sleek 2,800-square-foot Manhattan loft and a sprawling house in Beverly Hills.

"I like minimalism in architecture," West says. "The architect who's doing >>

my place, Claudio Silvestrin, is a minimalist. I'm no authority on architecture. But I'm coming. Eventually, I will be a master."

He digs through his duffel bag and produces the strange pair of eyeglasses that he wears in the "Stronger" video, technofuturistic-looking white spectacles with horizontal slats across the eyes in place of lenses. "These glasses are one of the best things to happen to me this year," he says.

"It's funny, being a so-called 'fashion icon,'" he continues. "I've made a lot of mistakes, fashionwise. *Expensive* mistakes. Honestly, I don't dress as fresh as I want to. But every day I'm getting better. By the time I'm 50, 60, I'll have impeccable taste."

Suddenly, 50 Cent's "I Get Money" comes buzzing out of the radio. "Turn this up, please," West says. "50 is popping on this." West nods his head to the beat. "I'm stanky rich/I'm-a die tryin' to spend this shit," 50 raps. Kanye laughs: "You know, I'm really not, like, *extremely* rich. I'll hear 50 drop a number, like, 'I spent this much,' and I'm like: 'Damn! 50 is so much richer than me!'"

50 Cent is on West's mind these days, and for good reason: *Graduation* is slated for release the same day as 50's third album, *Curtis*. "I pulled the trigger on that date," Kanye says. "I got on the phone with Def Jam like, 'Yo, I want to do this.' There were many people there who were like, 'Don't go up against him, blah blah blah.' There were people that weren't ready for that fight. And I was like, 'Man, this is what I do!'"

KANYE OMARI WEST

was born in Atlanta in 1977. When he was 3, his parents divorced and he moved to Chicago with his mother, Dr. Donda West, a college English professor. West is famously adoring of his mother—he paid tribute to her on *Late Registration's* rhapsodic "Hey Mama," and she has worked as Kanye's manager since retiring from teaching—but he had a close relationship with both parents, spending school vacations in Washington, D.C., with his father, Ray West, a former Black Panther and a photojournalist. ("I read this stuff like, 'Kanye didn't have a father,' and then my father starts to get mad at me. I'm like, 'Dad, do you know how many things I'm mad at the press for?'"

Kanye was raised in sophisticated, upper-middle-class circumstances—he attended high school in leafy Oak Lawn, Illinois—which helps explain the cosmopolitanism of his music, his disinterest in proving his hood bona fides and his skill at moving between genres, styles and social worlds. "I have a grasp on the temperament of people, from the hood to white people. I have an understanding of it, and I'll speak very candidly about it," he says.

Kanye briefly attended art school and



KANYE OR MAD DICTATOR?

Can you tell which of the following self-aggrandizing quotes come from Kanye and which from recently deceased despots?

- 1 "I think if there were a Bible written today, in the new millennium, I'd be one of the characters in it."
- 2 "I am seeing them from above, because God put me there."
- 3 "I am not one of the most influential and innovative talents—I am *the* most influential and innovative."
- 4 "I bring up historical subjects in a way that makes kids want to learn about them ... [I'm] definitely in the history books already."
- 5 "I'm personally against seeing my pictures and statues in the streets, but it's what the people want."

ANSWERS: 1. KANYE; 2. AUGUSTO PINOCHET OF CHILE; 3. KANYE; 4. KANYE; 5. SAPARMURAT NIVAZOV OF TURKMENISTAN.

Chicago's Columbia College but dropped out to pursue a musical career. He made a name producing tracks for local artists, and in 2000, got his first major-label break with "This Can't Be Life," on *The Dynasty: Roc La Familia*. His production style was distinctive: At a time when sampling was considered *déclassé*, West took big vocal loops from old soul records and adjusted the pitch, speeding them up to create a helium effect that was dubbed "chipmunk soul."

The rest is the stuff of hip-hop lore. Kanye's soul-drenched tracks for Jay-Z's 2001 smash *The Blueprint* made him hip-hop's hottest new producer. Then in October of the next year, he nearly died in a car accident after falling asleep at the wheel on the way home from a late-night recording session. This brush with mortality (recounted on his debut single, "Through the Wire") only increased West's determination to step

out from behind the mixing board.

"He always wanted to be an artist, from the beginning," Jay-Z recalls. "When we were working on tracks, as soon as he'd finish one of my songs, he'd be like, 'Check this out.' And then he'd put on a CD with one of his songs and just perform the whole thing right there in the studio. And I'd be like, 'Um, okaaaaaayyy, great. You got another beat?' Honestly, everybody was just trying to figure out how to keep him around, because he was making these fantastic tracks. That's really how his record deal happened. We were like, '[Heavy sigh] OK, let's just give him a deal.'"

For Jay-Z and his crew at Roc-A-Fella, Kanye was a brother from another planet. "We couldn't see how it would work for him commercially, in the rap game," Jay-Z says. "I mean, he had these pink polos with the collars up. We all had these big chains, we had hard backgrounds, no fathers. Kanye was just a different thing for us. We didn't know what to make of him."

THE KANYE MOBILE

is on the Jersey Turnpike now, approaching Giants Stadium. West asks if *Blender* would like to hear his new album. He shouts toward the front of the SUV, where the chauffeur, a bodyguard, his manager and one of his engineers are seated: "C'mon, let's turn off this T-Pain and put on my record!" The CD is promptly cued up, the volume boosted and the car is soon awash in the sound of *Graduation's* opening track, "I Wonder." It's gorgeous—a swirl of keyboards and strings, with a stately beat. But it sounds more like down-tempo electronic mood music— >>



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BRIAN ACHITT/GETTY IMAGES; AFP/GETTY IMAGES; DIANE BONDAREFF/AP PHOTO.

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KIEZO MOTV

a little bit like Moby's *Play*—than the opening track to a blockbuster rap album.

Blender glances over at West, whose eyes are closed as he sways to the music. "It's my favorite song on the album," he says finally. "I went back and forth about whether to open the album with this. But I decided it's perfect: People who like 'Stronger' but who aren't rap fans, they'll get into this, they'll feel the mood, get their head in a different space. And the people who are real rap fans, for the first two verses—where shit is really sparse—they'll think I'm just intro-ing the album."

The more West talks, the clearer it becomes that he is approaching his career a bit like a politician—trying to hold onto his traditional supporters while reaching out to swing voters. "Look at 'Stronger,'" he says. "It gets played on rap radio, and it gets added to rock stations? That's crazy."

So, will that kind of cross-over success make West the biggest star in the universe?

"I don't want to be the biggest star in the universe," he demurs. "I want to be *the No. 1 artist in the world*. There's a big difference. Who's the biggest star in the universe? Paris Hilton? Man, I don't want to be Paris Hilton. But Bono can

go to a restaurant and just chill, and he can sell out an 80,000-seater. That's the ideal."

By now, West's car has made it inside the stadium gates, and he's in a hurry: He's expected onstage in 20 minutes. He gets out of the car and almost immediately bumps into Sting, striding in with his wife, Trudie Styler, and a pack of handlers. The two musicians stop to share a hello hug. They've never met before but have spoken on the phone. They've got a surprise in store: Kanye will be joining the Police and John Mayer onstage for the last song of the evening, rapping a few bars in "Message in a Bottle." But now, West has his own set to do. He's whisked away in a golf cart and, after averting a minor backstage crisis involving the wardrobe of his all-female string section, he takes the stage to race through a hit-packed 20-minute set.

After the performance, West retreats backstage with his crew, including the rapper Consequence and DJ A-Trak. There, he receives visits from celebrity well-wishers. Al Gore clasps West in an awkward approxima-



SOUND OF THE POLICE: WEST AT LIVE EARTH WITH STING; SWAPPING BUSH JOKES WITH AL GORE.



tion of a thug clutch, crying, "Awesome job!" Cameron Diaz materializes to congratulate the rapper on his show. "It's amazing how one guy can command a whole stadium," chirps Diaz, whose legs are approximately the length of the light towers ringing the stadium. "Not a bad day," says West when Diaz leaves. "First Rosario Dawson"—the actress introduced West's performance—"now Cameron Diaz."

But West doesn't have much time to exult. As his manager, Don—a childhood friend—keeps reminding him, there's the small matter of a "Message in a Bottle" rap to attend to. He plops himself on a sofa, cues up an MP3 of "Message" on his laptop and starts trying to come up with lyrics. "I got a message in a bottle, a message for the models..." "Here's one thing that I know/Al Gore got robbed, you know he got my vote." At one point he jumps up, telling his crew, "Hey, check this out: 'This girl told me, buy me something, you major/But I said, Al Gore told me, don't waste paper.' That's

kind of dope. I might have to save that."

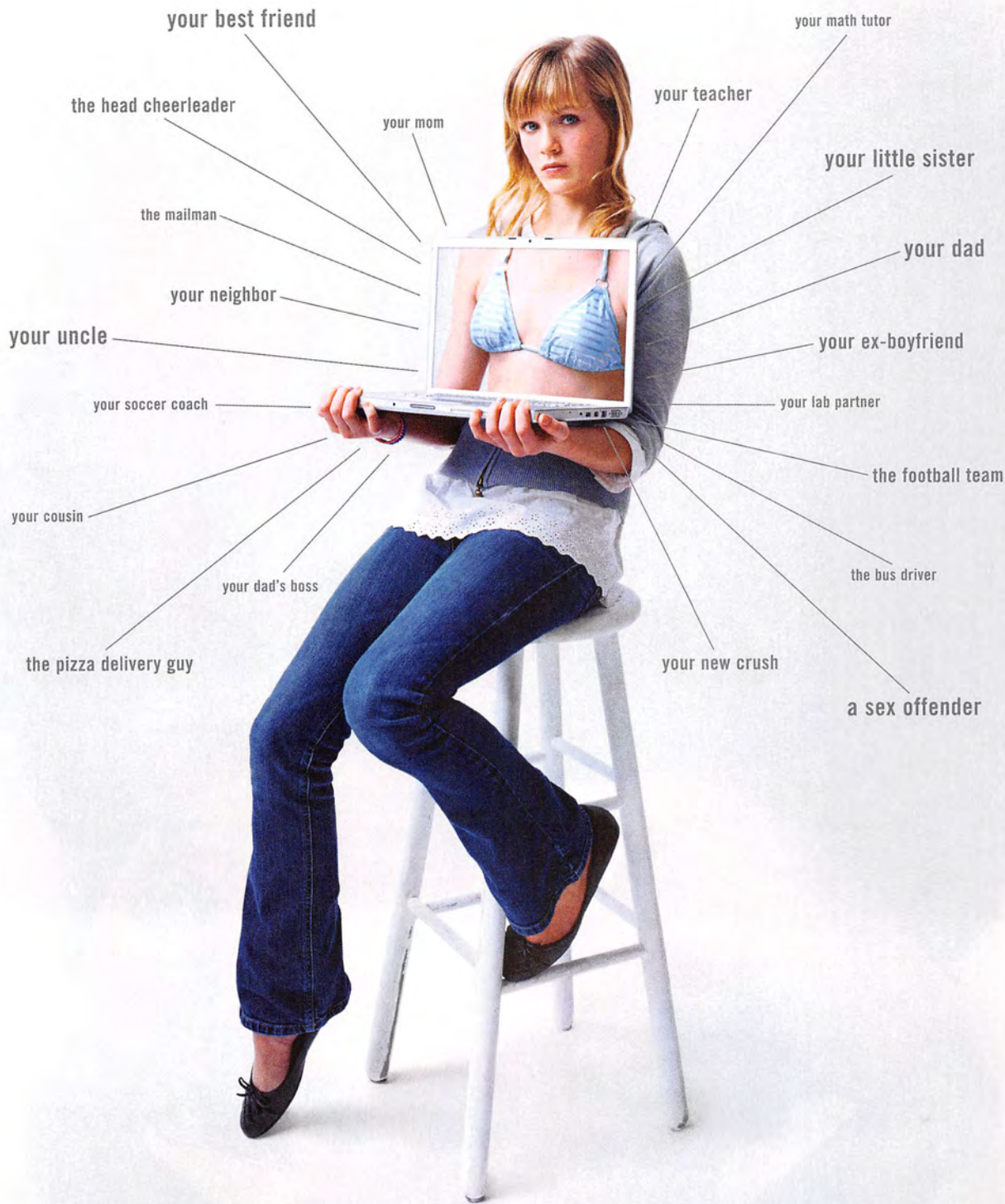
As the Police performance nears, West seems no closer to 12 solid bars of material. Don looks concerned, but West is remarkably unfazed. "I have enough. I can go up there and freestyle, hit some punch lines," he says, laughing. "I can always just kind of murmur a little." It seems a perversely casual approach to take to the closing performance of a blockbuster global concert.

When the time comes, West stands stone-faced in the wings, waiting for his cue. Suddenly Sting is bellowing to a roaring crowd, "Ladies and gentlemen, *Cain-Yay West!*" West strides onstage, takes up a position next to Sting and begins to rap:

*"I'm sending a message in a bottle
It says we need a new tomorrow
And we need some new leaders to follow...
And I'm-a tell you this because I should
Sting, you the only police good in the hood
And, now throw your hands in the air
We gonna elect John for mayor!"*

It's not exactly the kind of freestyle liable to strike fear into the heart of Lil Wayne. But when West reels around and cues drummer Stewart Copeland, who promptly smacks down on his snare and sends the band roaring back into the chorus, there's no denying that the moment feels big. For the next three minutes, West is not a rapper so much as a cheerleader, jumping up, pumping his fist, shouting, "We can save the world!" while Mayer and the Police steamroll toward the song's conclusion. As West bounds across the stage, you get the feeling he's exactly where he wants to be: The go-to rapper for the global rock aristocracy, closing out a concert before a football-stadium crowd of 52,000-plus and a planet-spanning home audience of millions more. He's not yet the No. 1 artist in the world—but he's getting there. And against the backdrop of the Live Earth stage, his outfit looks fresh. [BLENDER]

"KANYE HAD THESE PINK POLOS WITH THE COLLARS UP. WE ALL HAD THESE BIG CHAINS... WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF HIM." JAY-Z



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VILLE VALO: "DOES
THIS PEACOCK TAIL
MAKE MY BUTT
LOOK BIG?"



“There’s No Depth in Happiness”

Ville Valo, frontman for Finland’s No. 1 musical export, **HIM**, is a miserable bastard with a wicked sense of humor. Brace yourself for his “love metal” revolution—and a line of branded dildos

By JON DOLAN

Photographs by CHAD PITMAN

I

IS A ROCK star really a rock star if he checks into a hotel under his own name? It’s a beautiful afternoon in San Diego, and Ville Valo, frontman for Finland’s biggest band, HIM, is sitting in the plush W Hotel lobby, drinking a five-dollar coffee in a blue silk-and-wool Dolce & Gabbana suit. And not being noticed.

This is how he likes it, but it’s rarely how it is. Back home, from Fredrikshamn to Jämsänkoski, he is revered as a national treasure. Whether he’s buying a 19th-century military fortress or breaking up with his fiancée, a VJ on MTV Finland, the tiny Finn tabloid industry is there (Valo was recently named 13th Greatest Finn of All Time in a viewer-driven TV countdown). And though Scandinavians are a restrained people, not given to accosting even famous foreigners, much unobtrusive nodding attends his travels around his native Helsinki. >>

Here, however, he's just the founder of a 15-year-old ascending goth-rock band playing the 5:45–6:25 slot on Linkin Park's Projekt Revolution Tour. Tomorrow's stop: Chula Vista, California. Today: an afternoon to kill.

That won't be easy. The other members of HIM—guitarist Mikko "Linde" Lindström, bassist Mikko "Migé" Paananen, drummer Mika "Gas" Karppinen and keyboardist Janne "Burton" Puurtinen—have gone to *The Simpsons Movie*. But Valo doesn't like comedies, or any upbeat entertainment. "There's no depth in happiness," he says in a lush, wintry baritone suggesting a Cossack late-night-radio jock.

Well, there's a fleet of cool-looking naval ships docked in San Diego Bay a few blocks away ... "I don't like the sun. Just not used to it." A museum? "I fuckin' hate museums." Lunch at a nice restaurant, then? "... and fuckin' expensive restaurants. I don't need to prove the worthiness of my existence to some fuckin' cunts wearing the coolest gear at the moment,"

his own natty attire notwithstanding.

And with that, Valo wanders into a bland Irish pub and gets to work on a pot of coffee and a portion of the 80 cigarettes he consumes daily.

Valo may positively brim with hates, but his gift to the world is, ironically, his overpowering love. The 30-year-old Johnny Depp ringer is the inventor of "love metal." The self-styled sobriquet perfectly fits his band's mix of '70s metal-metal, '80s hair metal, '90s goth metal and, creepiest (and most metal) of all, the romantically overwrought Finnish ballad pop often referred to as *iskelmä* (think David Lynch in Lapland).

"We're too gay to be full-blown metal

**"WE'RE TOO GAY
TO BE FULL-BLOWN
METAL." VILLE VALO**

and too metal to be crooners," says Valo, his incandescent green eyes flashing almost as brightly as his nicotine-yellowed grin. "By being in this band, we extend the period of our teenage angst."

Valo is happily aware he sounds a bit silly, but he's doing seriously well. HIM (it stands for His Infernal Majesty, referencing a poem by Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey), has become one of Europe's biggest bands on the strength of music Valo opaquely defines as "Romeo and Juliet listening to Sabbath." Their 2000 European smash "Join Me in Death" and 2005 American modern-rock hit "Rip Out the Wings of a Butterfly," from their gold U.S. debut, *Dark Light*, have a gloom-mystic crunch an Evanescence fan might like, mixed with a lovelorn lugubriousness so overdone it must be tongue in cheek. "Scandinavians are such melancholic bastards, they eventually have to laugh about it," says Valo, who often quotes his own lyrics with a chortle.

He should. HIM's new album, *Venus Doom*, features lines like, "My heart's a graveyard, baby/And to evil we make love on passion's killing floor," fitting for a guy whose two favorite songs are "Can't Help Falling in Love," by Elvis Presley, and "Gilded Cunt," by Cradle of Filth.

Partially inspired by the suicide of an L.A. rocker friend, *Venus Doom* is HIM's heaviest record to date. It has a nine-minute prog opus, piles of black mass riffage, an acoustic song about suicide called "Song or Suicide" and a bass solo, which Valo describes as "ridiculous but also great."

"It is not an album for iPod shuffle," says bassist Paananen, a husky, bearded brute whose ancestors may have done solid work ransacking peaceful medieval villages.

If all this suggests an absurdist experiment in vein-opening bombast, Valo would heartily concur. "I don't like masks," says the only rock star you're likely to meet whose favorite Kiss period is the postmake-up '80s.

Valo may not opt for Gene Simmons in face paint, but he does show a similar flair for merch-friendly iconography. On November 22, 1996, his 20th birthday, while waiting for friends to bring over some kegs of beer, Valo sketched out a "heartagram," an unholy marriage of pentagram and heart that is the love-metal-nation's seal.

"When I met Ville, I said, 'Hey, you've got a great logo,'" says stocky, goateed drummer Karppinen, who joined the band in 1999. "If a band has a good logo, you can like them before you hear the music."

This is uniquely the case with HIM. More than even the most recognizable band logos—Led Zeppelin's "four runes," the Rolling Stones' lips and tongue—the heartagram perfectly advertises HIM's mix of evil and sweet. The occult symbol

FACE TIME (FROM LEFT): MIKKO LINDSTRÖM, MIKKO PAANANEN, VILLE VALO, JANNE PUURTINEN AND MIKA KARPPINEN.



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has at times threatened to transcend the band that created it, affixing itself to wallets, wristbands, beanies, candles, lanyards, flags and, most prominently, one irrepressible *Jackass* cast member.

MTV reality star Bam Margera became a HIM fan and confidant after falling for the band at a 2000 skateboard demo in Helsinki. He has a heartagram tattooed above his penis, licenses the image from Valo and was largely responsible for its American importation. Margera plastered the logo on his skateboard, and soon heartagram T-shirts were a top seller at mall-goth fashion syndicate Hot Topic. Before U.S. headbangers had heard even a note of HIM's music, they were wearing the heartagram in the hallways of their high schools.

"People tend to express their innermost self through clothing," Valo says. "Playing here on the first tour, without a record deal, we played the Roxy and Whisky. Places where Ozzy and Plant and Jim Morrison



HIM AND THEM (FROM LEFT): VALO, THEN-FIANCÉE JONNA NYGREN AND NO. 1 FAN BAM MARGERA.

played. And they were packed."

Valo became acquainted with the ins and outs of product placement as a teenager working in his father's Helsinki sex shop, Toys for Adults. He's a self-described dildo expert ("the best latex comes from Germany") and considers the family busi-

ness a possible fallback career if being a rock god grows stale.

"We're thinking about trying to sell HIM dildos," he says. "When you're looking in the mirror and always feeling inferior, the best thing is to make a great joke out of it and make some money."



LOGO A GO-GO

HIM's heartagram (above) is the latest in a long line of iconic band logos. *Blender* assesses four of the all-time best, with help from famed graphic designer (and Apple Computer logo creator) Rob Janoff

GRATEFUL DEAD

Graphic designer Bob Thomas, 1969

"This grew out of psychedelic posters, but a lot of that was hippie-flowery," Janoff says. "The Dead were a reaction to that, so it's a skull. There's an element of attracting biker guys, which was a huge part of their crowd, but the lightning bolt says 'blowing your mind on drugs, man,' which certainly didn't alienate the psychedelic community."

A 1987 Volvo's bumper



ROLLING STONES

Art student John Pasche, 1971

"This one stands up to time better than anything else. It's instantly recognizable. When it came out, it was an in-your-face thing, like what people were feeling in the Stones' music. The time was about sexual revolution, and if it were a giant penis in the mouth instead of a tongue, it'd be gross, but this is provocative without being explicit or vulgar."

The investment banker in row AA, seat 1

RAMONES

Lighting man Arturo Vega, 1977

"This has a playful, anti-authority vibe, which instantly tells you a lot about the band. It's a parody of the presidential seal, of course. The only problem with this one is that when you shrink it down—say, to fit on a button—it gets harder to see all the little elements going on."

Cooler older brothers turned video-store clerks



WU-TANG CLAN

DJ-producer Allah Mathematics, 1992

"These guys are all about old kung fu movies, and I like the little Asian hit in their typeface. The W looks a bit like a bat and lends itself to the W hand gesture their fans make at concerts. They were also one of the first rap groups to move into fashion, and for a fashion logo, it's incredibly effective. Very elegant."

Twentysomething rap nostalgics

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"ARE YOU READY TO
ROCK, KORSHOLM?"
(TRUST US, THIS JOKE
KILLS IN FINLAND.)

Lately, he has enjoyed some time to contemplate future business moves. Before he embarked on Projekt Revolution, a doctor told Valo he needed to stop drinking. The average Finn consumes 9.3 liters of booze a year, placing Finland among the drunkest nations on earth. Valo was, to say the least, doing his part to maintain this standard.

"I was on a binge for two and half years," he says. "I've shat my pants, I've shat blood, I've vomited blood. I've ended up in beds with people I never thought I'd be closer to than a hundred yards. When you find yourself in a Jacuzzi surrounded by hookers in a place you've never been ..."

Blender offers that most people would do that drunk or sober.

"At least if I'd been sober," he responds, "I might've gotten something out of it."

In June, he checked himself into Promises, the \$50,000-a-month "Ritz of Rehab" in Malibu, where his stay happened to overlap with that of a certain lead-footed 21-year-old celebute. "She seemed like a really nice girl," he says of Lindsay Lohan. "But I don't understand why, if you've got all these bodyguards around, you don't just give 'em the fuckin' car keys."

While the experience didn't change his suspicions about what he deems America's "rehab-happy" culture, it appears to have worked, and the rest of HIM is supportive. "It seems good for him," Paananen says.

"Of course, sometimes being fucked-up is good, too," offers keyboardist Puurtinen.

Be that as it may, a culture of sobriety

"I DON'T LIKE THE SUN. JUST NOT USED TO IT." VILLE VALO

seems to have infected the entire Projekt Revolution Tour, from My Chemical Romance's post-coke Gerard Way to Linkin Park's large retinue of wives and kids, who sit stage right watching the show each night. HIM was once up for consuming two cases of beer before sound check. Now their tour bus is a supremely mellow sanctuary. They chain-smoke, speak Finnish, listen to their amiable tour manager tell bow-hunting stories and watch the Military Channel. Guitarist Lindström speaks no English within ear-shot of *Blender*.

Occasionally, however, someone will need use of his second language. Ten minutes before the Chula Vista show, Puurtinen asks, "Where is the shitting place?" Introducing their sound tech, Karppinen declares, "Call this guy Pussy!"

Even if they did have a taste for Crüe-esque high living, the package-tour schedule doesn't leave much time to party. They pull into the amphitheater parking lot, idle for about a half hour, change out of their sweatpants into rocker gear (for Valo, the same D&G suit he wore the previous day) and hit the stage. Forty minutes, nine songs

and one Jägermeister sales-rep meet-and-greet later, they're back in the bus checking ESPN.com for hockey news.

"There's a hockey league for bands in Finland," says Karppinen, whose tattoos, along with the requisite heartagram, also include the Pittsburgh Penguins' logo and Mario Lemieux's number 66. "We have cool jerseys. They are camouflage."

The next stop is Phoenix. Around midnight, their bus lumbers into a truck stop/casino/mall/restaurant. For the average rock band, this would afford a chance for snickering mockery of the admittedly terrifying clientele. But the men of HIM were born without the American irony chip. Their sense of the inane is a little more pure. They survey the 19 kinds of beef jerky and wander like visiting Martians amid the zombies playing quarter slots.

Valo, a black hoodie pulled low over an English riding cap, walks past the *Playboy* mugs toward a T-shirt rack stocked entirely with Christian apparel. The Mountain Dew logo has been mutated to proclaim "Jesus Meant to DIE for You." The MySpace logo has been repurposed to say "Jesus Died for MySpace in Heaven." He stands agape trying to figure out what's being perverted: the corporate logos or the religious context. Finally, he chooses one that says "Follow Jesus: Fisher of Men," with an image a little like the Miami Dolphins logo. *Blender* wonders, when does America stop seeming bizarre? He grins satanically: "Never." [BLENDER]



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YOUNG TURKS



PRETTY RICKY

PROS
Abs; starting a women's lingerie line

CONS
Confusing name; self-parodic raunchiness



KINGS OF LEON

PROS
Beards; drugs; groupies

CONS
Shaved beards; loved by critics and Europeans



ALY AND AJ

PROS
Barbie Doll looks; Mickey Mouse marketing muscle

CONS
Hello Kitty endorsement deal; underage fan base



THE CYRUSES

PROS
Hannah Montana; tush push

CONS
The mullet; *Doc*



THE SIMPSONS

PROS
Breasts; Ashlee's nose job

CONS
Joe; acid reflux

THE SHOWDOWN

Before minting its own sheet-soaking blend of hip-hop and R&B, **PRETTY RICKY**'s quartet of brothers were backup dancers for an older sibling. The **FOLLOWILL** brothers—Nathan, Caleb and Jared—were dragged by their alcoholic preacher dad from one church revival to the next, but later hooked up with a cousin to play the Devil's music as **KINGS OF LEON**. Homeschooled queens of tween **ALY** and sister **AJ MICHALKA**'s Disney-fueled, multimedia assault includes three albums, a movie, several TV appearances and numerous

endorsement deals. **MILEY CYRUS** shares the Michalkas' love of all things Jesus and Disney, but also has a father—**BILLY RAY CYRUS**, the hockey-haired pretty boy behind the 1992 hit "Achy, Breaky Heart"—and a younger sister who star with her on the Disney Channel's highest-rated series, *Hannah Montana*. But even the Cyruses must bow to the media empire forged by **JESSICA** and **ASHLEE SIMPSON**'s overbearing Baptist-minister-turned-manager dad, Joe—and his willingness to sacrifice their lives at the altar of fame.



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THE LENçons

PROS
Beatles; *Double Fantasy*

CONS
Julian; bed-ins



THE DYLANs

PROS
Bob; Wallflowers

CONS
Jesus; acting



THE ALLMANS

PROS
Duane's guitar; Gregg's voice

CONS
Duane's motorcycle; Gregg's personal life



THE MARLEYS

PROS
Bob; Bob's insatiable libido; Rita's tolerance for Bob's insatiable libido

CONS
Cancer



THE WILSONs

PROS
Brian; Dennis

CONS
Murry; "Kokomo"; Wilson Phillips

THE SHOWDOWN

JOHN LENNON's resume is impeccable, but **YOKO**'s avant-garde noise is a historical asterisk, their son **SEAN**'s two albums have been commercial duds and the less-said-about son **JULIAN**'s 1984 featherweight pop confection "Too Late for Goodbyes" the better. Only one of **BOB DYLAN**'s sons, **JAKOB**, went into the family business, but he's sold 4 million albums fronting the Wallflowers. **DUANE ALLMAN** died in a motorcycle wreck in 1971, thus sparing him the sight of brother **GREGG**'s 1975 marriage to Cher, which

produced one son—**ELIJAH BLUE**, who now heads the forgettable goth rockers Deadsy—and one atrocious album (credited to Allman and Woman). Reggae icon **BOB MARLEY** sired at least eight children (with eight different women), some of whom were either in the Melody Makers with oldest son **ZIGGY** or have released reasonable solo albums—including **DAMIAN**, whose *Welcome to Jamrock* won a Grammy. But for a musical legacy tethered to familial drama, the **WILSON** brothers' **BEACH BOYS** are hard to beat.



THE WINNER: **THE WILSONS**

OH, BROTHER



THE OSMONDS

PROS
Teeth; Donny's self-effacing humor

CONS
Mormonism; "Puppy Love"



THE ISLEYS

PROS
Longevity; "Shout"

CONS
The IRS



THE WAYS

PROS
The Black Parade; MCRmy

CONS
Sunlight; marriage



THE GIBBS

PROS
Barry; *Saturday Night Fever*

CONS
Andy; *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*



THE JACKSONS

PROS
Michael pre-1993; Janet; "I Want You Back"

CONS
Michael post-1993; Martin Bashir; La Toya

THE SHOWDOWN

Emerging from *The Andy Williams Show*, the OSMOND BROTHERS stormed—OK, politely ambled—into the '70s, offering parent-friendly pop that yielded a string of hits, numerous TV shows and DONNY AND MARIE. The ISLEY BROTHERS scored iconic early-rock hits in the '60s, crafted groundbreaking soul in the '70s and had R. Kelly revive their career in the late '90s and early '00s—a development soured by RONALD'S 2006 tax-evasion conviction. Pasty New Jersey comic-book geeks GERARD and MIKEY

WAY of MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE boast two platinum albums and public battles with booze, coke (Gerard) and depression (Mikey). Brothers BARRY, MAURICE and ROBIN GIBBS have sold over 180 million records as the BEE GEES, and manufactured hits for their dubiously talented, frequently drug-addled younger brother, ANDY. But the Gibbs are no match for the madly ambitious, prodigiously dysfunctional JACKSON family: five decades of hits only overshadowed by their penchant for unceasingly bizarre public spectacle.



THE WINNER: THE JACKSONS

MULTIGENERATIONAL MADNESS



THE OSBOURNES

PROS
Black Sabbath; *The Osbournes*

CONS
Kelly; copycat shows like *Gene Simmons Family Jewels*



THE THOMPSONS

PROS
Fairport Convention; divorce

CONS
Sufism; Linda's hysterical dysphonia



THE WAINWRIGHTS/MCGARRIGLES

PROS
Rufus; Loudon; Kate and Anna

CONS
Relative obscurity



THE WILLIAMSES

PROS
Hank Sr.; Hank Jr.

CONS
Booze; early death



THE CARTERS/CASHES

PROS
Johnny; the Carter Family

CONS
The 1980s

THE SHOWDOWN

KELLY OSBOURNE inherited dad OZZY's antisocial tendencies, but not his musical gift. During the 10 years ex-Fairport Conventioneer RICHARD THOMPSON was married to LINDA PETERS, they joined a Sufi commune, had two kids—TEDDY and KAMILA, both future singer-songwriters—and created 1982's divorce-folk classic *Shoot Out the Lights*. Acerbic singer-songwriter LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III married fellow folkie KATE MCGARRIGLE and produced singer-songwriter siblings MARTHA and RUFUS. After country-music

pioneer/incorrigible fuckup HANK WILLIAMS SR. died at 29, his son, HANK JR., became the world's best Hank Sr. impersonator, then refashioned himself as a massively successful Southern rocker; his grandson HANK III plays punk-blitzed country and his granddaughter HOLLY released her country debut in 2004. But when JOHNNY CASH married JUNE CARTER, he united country's past and present, and created a dynasty of hitmaking and legendary substance abuse.



THE WINNER: THE CARTERS/CASHES

THE SEMIFINALS



THE SIMPSONS VS. THE WILSONS

Between **JESSICA**'s doomed marriage to third-tier boy-band hunk Nick Lachey and both sisters' apparent insistence on dating only musicians (Pete Wentz, Ryan Cabrera, John Mayer, Adam Levine), the **SIMPSONS** are admirably trying to expand their dynastic reach. But even when you consider the 8 million or so albums they've sold, they're out of their depth here. The **WILSONS**' successes dwarf the **SIMPSONS**—hell, **WILSON PHILLIPS** sold 8 million records themselves—and as inappropriate as Joe Simpson's comments about his daughters' breasts are, they're certainly less inappropriate than patriarch **MURRY** making son **BRIAN** shit on a newspaper in front of his family as punishment for misbehaving.

THE WINNER: THE WILSONS



THE JACKSONS VS. THE CARTERS/CASHES

Arguably, the King of Pop's and the Man in Black's accomplishments cancel each other out. The **CARTER FAMILY** wins points for a surprising level of dysfunction—after **A.P.** and **SARA** divorced, Sara married A.P.'s cousin. But the **JACKSON 5**'s first four singles are the most flawless how-do-you-do in pop history, and the group was impressively dysfunctional—**TITO**, **JACKIE**, **JERMAINE** and papa **JOE** were rumored to have indulged with groupies while **MICHAEL** and **MARLON** watched. Beyond that, Carter/**CASH**'s supporting players (**JUNE**, **ROSANNE**, **CARLENE**) best the Jacksons' backbench (**REBBIE**, **JERMAINE**, **LA TOYA**); but ultimately, **JANET**'s commercial clout (over 45 million albums sold) and bizarre antics (hello, wardrobe malfunction!) prove decisive.

THE WINNER: THE JACKSONS

THE FINALS




THE WILSONS VS. THE JACKSONS



Both families' taskmaster dads were frustrated musicians who hoisted their thwarted dreams on their children. According to a **MICHAEL JACKSON** documentary, Joe used to beat Michael and then literally pour salt into his wounds. **MURRY WILSON** reportedly whacked Brian in the head so hard it caused permanent hearing damage (Brian later denied this). For a while, both approaches produced their desired effects: The **BEACH BOYS** became a hitmaking machine in the mid-'60s, culminating in the pop masterpiece *Pet Sounds*. But the Jacksons' successful run was longer—from the **JACKSON 5**'s late-'60s heyday to Michael's and **JANET**'s world-beating solo careers in the '80s and '90s. And the abuse took its toll. **BRIAN WILSON** became a fat, insane, reclusive man-child; brother **DENNIS** befriended Charles Manson and drowned in 1983; cousin **MIKE LOVE** grew into a litigious prick, suing for publishing royalties, use of the band's name and supposedly to keep Dennis from snatching the hat off his head. But compared to the Jacksons—a family where you can marry your brother's ex-fiancée, convert to Islam, move to Dubai and still be considered one of the sane ones (see Jermaine)—the Wilsons look like the Cleavers. For the last 15 years, the Jacksons—particularly Michael—have lived out their failures in just as public a manner as they did their triumphs, fitting for a family committed to entertaining the world no matter the cost.

WHY DOES JESSICA ALBA
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 **until**
THERE'S A CURE

“I’m Not a Girl Anymore”

AFTER TWO ROUGH BREAKUPS—ONE WITH HER BOYFRIEND, ONE WITH HER RECORD LABEL—SINGER/PIANO-TICKLER **Vanessa Carlton** RETURNS WITH SOME NEW FAMOUS FRIENDS AND A FONDNESS FOR “ASS BEATS”

By JONAH WEINER

Photograph by SHAWN MORTENSEN

You started playing piano when you were 2 and ballet dancing at 9. Did you ever have a rebellious phase—or were you always a precocious twerp? Are you saying I’m a goody two-shoes? I also rode horses, too, if I can just fill out the stereotype. My rebellion came a little late, when I was 17. I’d been living in a dorm in New York City for ballet school since I was 14, and I hadn’t really taken advantage of that. One day I was just like, “Holy shit. This is the Devil’s playground!”

What’s the most trouble you got into? I didn’t get arrested or anything. I just started partying. And I dropped out of ballet school. It’s such a regimented life. If you’re going to tell me to do something, I’m going to question it.

You’re into Anne Rice and J.R.R. Tolkien, and you recorded part of your last album at George Lucas’s Skywalker Ranch. On a scale of one to Nimoy, how much of a geek are you? Um, what is Nimoy?

Well, you’re cooler than we thought. He’s the guy who played Spock on Star Trek. I don’t like *Star Trek*. I was never into space. I like the old: the Shire. Vampires. I love elves and hobbits. At Skywalker I did see the original Lightsaver, though. Is that what it’s called? The sword thing?

Close enough for a girl. Kanye West called your 2002 hit “A Thousand Miles” “the white song that all black people like.” Do you have a big African-American fan base? A lot of rappers seem to like it. I was backstage at a radio show and Treach from Naughty by Nature came up to me and said, “You’re going to be my next baby mama.” I thought to myself, “Well, this is hitting a buzzer for a certain type of guy!”

Your new album, *Heroes & Thieves*, is coming out on Irv Gotti’s hip-hop label, The Inc. How did a notorious playa like Gotti court you? His pitch was this: “You’re the motherfucking shit.” I was like, “Great! I’ve been waiting for that reaction my whole life.” It’s funny, he has this car called a Maybach, and the first time he came to pick me up, I called it a Maytag by accident. I called his \$500,000 car a dishwasher. But he was OK with that. He calls it his Maytag now.

He brought the world Ja Rule and Ashanti. Did he try to get you to sing over booty beats? Oh, yeah! [Rolls her eyes.] I’m *all* about the ass beats.

Are you sexy-ing up yourself on this album? Let’s put it this way. I’m 27 now. I started writing some of the songs on my first record when I was 16. I was a girl. I’m not a girl anymore. It’s the right time for me to do a complete frontal nude shot, basically. [Laughs.]

Now that you’re sharing a label with Ja, are you afraid 50 Cent is going to write a mean rhyme about you? God, I hope so. I want a beef!

You recently split with your longtime boyfriend, Third Eye Blind frontman Stephan Jenkins. What went wrong? Be quiet. I am not talking about that with you.

You’ve been telling audiences lately, “Never date a musician.” Translation: He was a two-timing, self-absorbed artiste? No! I adore him. But, look, every girl knows she’ll get her heart broken if she dates the lead singer of a band.

You’ve become close friends with Stevie Nicks. What do you two do for fun? We’ll go out, play dress up. She cracks me up. I went on a plane with her once, and she did a split in the aisle. She’s always the coolest chick in the room. I’m so lucky to have found a mentor in her. I think men mentor men more than women mentor women. Women can be so territorial—they don’t help each other.

Say it’s an average Friday night. Are you curled up with some Debussy sheet music by 10 P.M.? No, I’m out drinking at my local pub. I’ve gone out partying with Irv, too, drinking on so-and-so’s yacht.

Can you keep up with him? Please! I’m more hardcore than he is. I don’t know if it’s because I’m Russian, but you could stick an IV full of vodka in me and I’m immune to it.

Is booze your only vice? I’ve been through tours where I was smoking pot every day. I’m more of a stoner than anything else, but I’ve tried everything. Except heroin.

What’s the one drug you’ll never do again? I’ll do them all again!

Play life coach for a moment. What do Britney and Lindsay need to do to get themselves back on track? I’ve never met them, but I empathize. These are young women, struggling. We should all be rooting for them to figure it out. A lot of the trouble is in the parents—the stage moms exploiting their children. It’s going to fuck up anyone. You can’t be a child star and be normal. You can’t. I wasn’t even nearly as much of a child star as those girls. I was just a ballet dancer. And I’m still recovering. [Laughs.]

“You can’t be a child star and be normal.”



"NO, YOU MAY NOT
TICKLE MY IVORIES."

GOLDEN GIRLS:
TWO CAMPERS IN
A RARE MOMENT
OF NOT-SINGING.





SO YOU THINK
YOU CAN
SING?



BUG SPRAY! FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS! BUCKY COVINGTON! *BLENDER* PACKS A SLEEPING BAG AND HEADS OFF TO THE 10-DAY POP-STAR TUTORIAL—AND MULTIPLATFORM BRAND EXTENSION—THAT IS *AMERICAN IDOL* SUMMER CAMP

By JOSH EELLS
Photography by BRIAN FINKE



CAMPERS AT MORNING STRETCH: RUBEN STUDDARD COULD HAVE USED SOME OF THIS.



SAVANNA AND GEORGIA IN SINGING CLASS: SANJAYA COULD HAVE USED SOME OF THIS.

Where is Simon Cowell when you need him?

It's a gorgeous summer afternoon at a former boarding school in Massachusetts. The sun is shining, the grass cool beneath bare feet. The leafy, redbrick campus glimmers with Victorian splendor, like Hogwarts gone New England. And in front of us, on a makeshift plywood stage, a darling, doe-eyed little girl is absolutely butchering Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful." Her rhythm is clumsy, her warbling off-key. "Pitchy" doesn't begin to describe it.

But the nasty Simon dig never comes. There's not even a Randy-esque "You did your thing, dawg." Instead, the response is pure Paula: "We love you, Ashley!"

"Whooooo!"

"You're a star!"

Welcome to the first-ever *American Idol* summer camp. Kids from all over the country have flocked to this hilly vale a few hours west of Boston, with a twinkle in their eyes, a song in their hearts and SpongeBob pillows in their duffel bags. For 10 "magic-filled days" in July, they'll brave mosquitoes, sunburns and lots and lots of Tater Tots, all in the hopes of becoming the next Kelly Clarkson—or at least the next Kellie Pickler. Call it American Idyll: a bucolic boot camp for aspiring pop stars, *Fame* meets *Salute Your Shorts*.

"Singing is life, my passion," says Robert, 13, a self-proclaimed diva in pajama-pant capris. "This is where I belong."



HAVE YOU EVER dreamed of being a star?

That's the call that went out last April, when *American Idol* announced it was

throwing open its doors, Wonka-like, to 300 lucky kids between the ages of 12 and 15. For \$2,900 each, they'd get the chance to rub elbows with former Idols, meet surprise guests ("confirmation pending") and study with pros who could "help [them] on [their] way to stardom." Organizers won't say how many applications they received ("We don't want to scare people away," says executive producer Scott Kramer), but you can bet it's a lot. For the last six years, *Idol* has been the country's great uniter, bring-

civilization—there's no denying the show's track record. *America's Next Top Model* has yet to launch an A-list catwalk career, and no *Fortune 500* company has an *Apprentice* grad as its CEO. But *American Idol* mints genuine stars. For a generation of would-be chart-toppers, it's become the quickest, surest route to pop success, open to every Tom, Dick and Sanjaya with a microphone and a dream.

But how realistic are those dreams? Has *Idol* empowered fans to follow their hearts—or created a nation of hopelessly deluded young fame-hounds? "Of all the kids here, maybe two could make it past the first round," says Jon Peter Lewis, a finalist on *Idol's* season three and an instructor at the camp. "Plenty of them could be

Idol Camp is the Gen-Y version of Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp: Instead of Roger Daltrey and Ted Nugent, you get Vonzell Solomon and Ace Young.

ing together rich and poor, blue state and red, Gershwin-loving grandmas and text-happy tweens—a rare instance of cultural consensus in an increasingly fractured age. What kid *wouldn't* apply? (Plus: Blake Lewis might be there!)

For FremantleMedia, which coproduces the TV show, *Idol* Camp was a no-brainer. "We're constantly inundated with requests from younger kids to interact with the brand," says Keith Hindle, Fremantle's executive vice president for licensing and the man who first proposed the camp. "You have to be 16 to try out for the show, but this is a place where kids can learn what it's really like to be a performer."

No matter which side of the *Idol* debate you're on—landscape-shifting beacon of populism vs. festering cancer on the soul of

great backup singers. But these kids don't want to be backup singers. They want to be stars."

Georgia Napolitano has wanted to be a star since she was 5 years old. "I'll always remember it," she says, like a 13th-century mystic describing a vision of the Madonna. "I was living in England, and the video for Cher's 'Believe' came on the downstairs TV. I started singing along, and somehow I knew every single word. Ever since then, I've known this is what I wanted to do."

She's sitting at a wooden picnic table, wearing a black spaghetti-strap top, khaki short-shorts and silver aviators, and looking a grade or two older than her 15 years. Her face is wide and pretty, and her brown hair is splashed with highlights. Earlier this summer she had two teeth >>



Orbit
SWEET MINT

removed, to accommodate her new braces. "I need to have perfect teeth for when I'm famous," she says.

Georgia started taking singing lessons at age 9. At 10, when her family was living in Spain, she won a kind of *Pop Idol* for kids, and last year she was invited to London to perform at a party for David Beckham. In 2004 she auditioned for teen-pop impresario Lou Pearlman; he liked her but said she was too young. "I really thought it was going to happen then," she says wistfully. Now she takes dance classes, acts in a theater near her home in Austin, Texas, and trains with a voice coach twice a week. She reveres Xtina and says she'd love to work with Timbaland. And she watches *American Idol* every week. One day at open mic, she sings Etta James's "At Last"—the downfall of countless *Idol* wannabes—and nails it perfectly.

"If anyone here could make it to Hollywood," says Lewis, "it's Georgia."



AN IDOL CAMPER'S day begins at 7:45 A.M., with the Pop-Tarts Crazy-Good Morning Stretch. From there it's breakfast—eggs, fresh fruit, OJ—and then on to the main tent for Morning Sing. The rest of the day is full of classes like Gotta Dance, Soul

"These kids know exactly what they want to do with their lives," says *Idol* alum Bucky Covington. "It blows my mind."

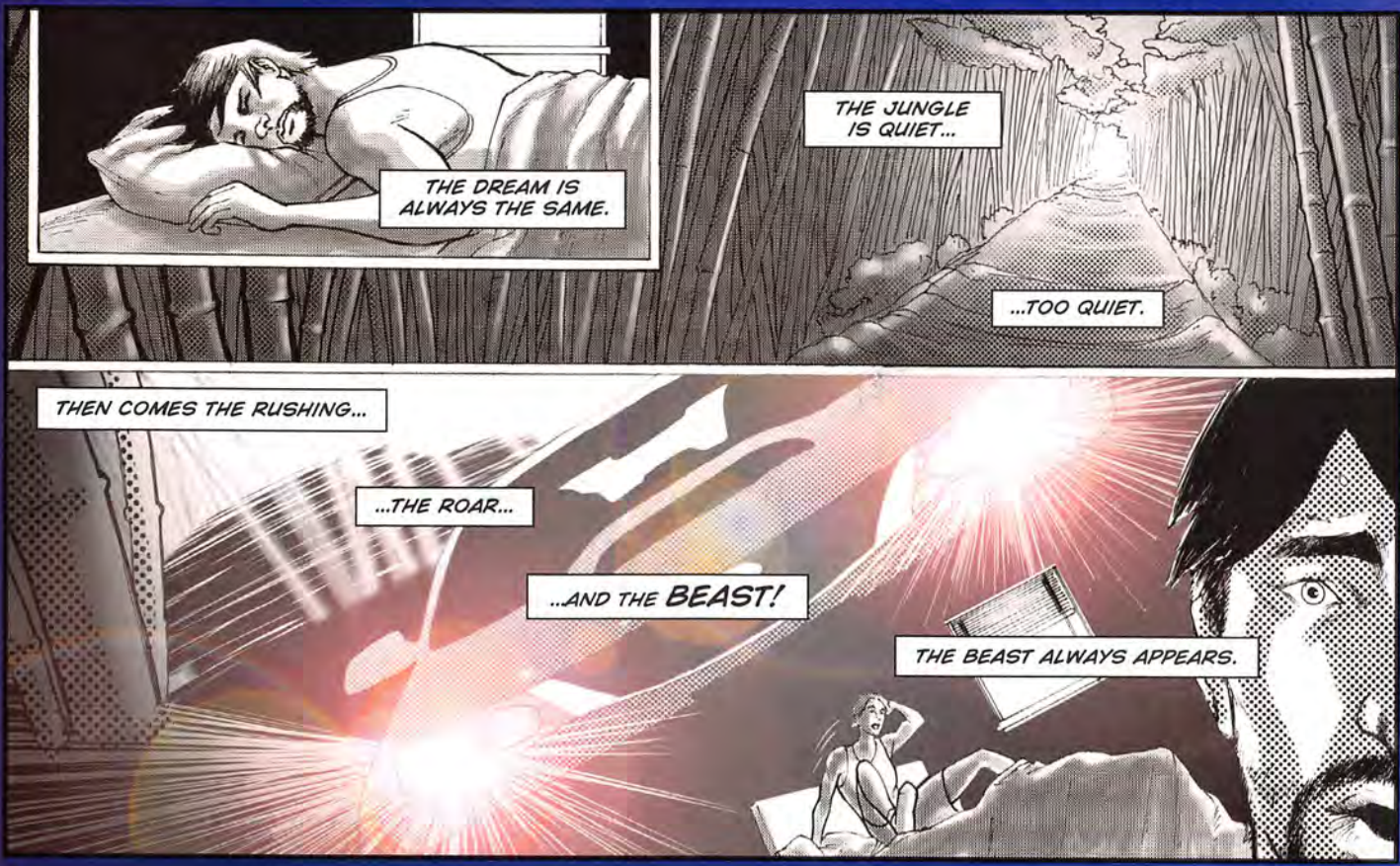
Sounds and Sing, Sing, Sing. (There's also time for "traditional camp activities," which apparently means swimming, volleyball and arts & crafts, not wedgies, Indian burns and archery mishaps.) Then it's a master class with an *AI* musical director or wardrobe stylist, followed by dinner, an evening performance, a nightly wrap-up and then back to the dorms for lights-out at 9:30.

And through it all, the campers sing. They sing when they wake up and when they go to bed. They sing in class and on their way to class and after class. They sing in the cafeteria. They sing in the shower. They sing Fergie, they sing Shania, they sing Motown, and most of all they sing show tunes—*Dreamgirls*, *Hairspray*, *Wicked*. If some melisma-hating terrorist were to detonate a dirty bomb in north-central Massachusetts this week, the future of American musical theater would be dealt a crippling blow.

At lunch one day we meet Sydney, a precocious, polka-dotted 13-year-old.

"I have my whole life planned out!" she chirps between bites of an oatmeal-raisin cookie. "Do you want to hear it?" The ensuing monologue is too long to relate here, but it involves Broadway, a network sitcom, a handsome husband—"not an actor"—and three kids named Hudson, Riley and Harper. Or maybe Kenzie. She hasn't decided.

Organizers stress that the camp isn't a golden ticket to Hollywood. "Acceptance into *Idol* Camp will not result in placement on *American Idol*," reads a disclaimer on the Web site. There are no *AI* producers roaming the grounds, no talent scouts. Says one teacher: "These kids aren't getting anything they couldn't get from a good public-school arts program." Instead, the lure of *Idol* Camp is the whiff of fame it provides. It's the Gen Y version of Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp: In place of Roger Daltrey and Ted Nugent, you get *AI* alums like Vonzell Solomon and Ace Young. That the show's *actual* stars (Clarkson, Jennifer Hudson, Carrie



Underwood) are nowhere to be found hardly seems to matter. As Jon Peter Lewis says, "These kids don't care about me. They're excited about what I represent."

One of the most popular ex-Idols is Bucky Covington, the affable country singer who finished eighth in 2006. He's at camp for a day, visiting classes, signing autographs and generally being adored. "I must have given about a thousand hugs," he says later. Dylan, a giddy 13-year-old farm boy from Ohio, seems particularly stoked: "We actually got to sing for somebody with a video on CMT!"

That night, Covington sits for a Q&A session. Most of the questions are fluffy fun—"Which Idol did you have a crush on?"; "Are you good at soccer?"—but some show real insight: *What kind of contract did you have to sign for the show? Did your friends treat you differently afterward? What advice do you have for us possible future American Idol winners?*

To its detractors, *Idol's* sins are legion: It's cruel, it's amateurish, it's cheesier than Easy Mac. It's a "monster-size celebration of mediocrity," one critic sniffed, that preys on the fantasies of the naive.

But give *Idol* this: It has created some pretty savvy music fans. Prying open the



factory gates and lifting the curtain on the star-making machine, the show offers glimpses of pop stars at their most tedious—rehearsing the same song for hours, making mistake after mistake, getting tired and sick and still having to shoot Ford

commercials. Thanks to reality TV, today's teens might be hungrier for fame than any generation in history—but they're also the best equipped for it.

"When I was 14, all I wanted to be was 15," Covington tells us. "These kids know >>



exactly what they want to do with their lives. It blows my mind."

But is that healthy? we wonder.

He thinks for a minute. "That, I'm not so sure."

It's certainly good for business. Idol Camp is the latest offshoot of what might be the most lucrative entertainment brand of all time: a global multimedia empire worth an estimated \$2.5 billion—roughly the GDP of Mongolia. In 2004 consumers spent an estimated \$215 million on *Idol*-branded products: sweatshirts, blue jeans, baby bibs, messenger bags, stationery, lip gloss, ice cream, Barbies, Happy Meals, PlayStation games, digital cameras, karaoke machines, even *Chicken Soup for the American Idol Soul*. Currently in the works are a Vegas show, a theme-park attraction and an Idol cruise. It's all part of what Fremantle's Hindle calls "monetizing the brand."

"We've always been keen to make *Idol* a year-round property," Hindle says. "The show is only on from January to May. The camp is a way to keep it in people's minds, make it part of the cultural consciousness."

Of course, compared to the 31 million fans who watched this year's finale, 300 kids is pretty insignificant. Idol Camp doesn't even turn a profit, and probably won't for

a few years. "The benefit to us," Hindle says, "is the media coverage these kids get": the free publicity in hometown papers, local news broadcasts and, yes, magazine articles. And because the long-term plan is to recruit enough corporate sponsors to make the camp totally free, it's also an attractive investment for what Hindle terms "altruistically minded advertisers." Underprivileged kids get to meet their favorite stars, companies get prime product placement and positive PR, and the *Idol* brand gets customers for life.

It's easy to be cynical about all this—especially because it seems to be working. One day the camp director, Donna Milani Luther, assembles the kids in the main tent to discuss what they like about camp, and what they think could be better. Most of the suggestions are predictable: later curfews, warmer showers, air-conditioning. Near the end, a tiny girl in glasses raises her hand.

"Maybe next year there could be, like, a store?" she says.



WAITING IN THE WINGS: CAMPERS BACKSTAGE AT DRESS REHEARSAL

Milani Luther looks confused. "You mean in case you forgot something? Like a toothbrush?"

The girl shakes her head. "No—someplace where we could buy Idol Camp stuff. You know, like shirts. Or DVDs."



AS CAMP WINDS down, homesickness starts to set in. In the set-building class, a glum-looking group of girls commiserates around a power saw. "I haven't been to the mall in forever," says Randi.



"I can't remember the last time I had McDonald's," says Moriah, frowning.

"I miss my puppy," sighs Kendall.

Georgia, meanwhile, couldn't be happier. This morning she found out she'd been invited to sing the national anthem at a Red Sox game next week. By afternoon the news is all over the camp—inspiring much chatter, and not a little jealousy.

It's a tricky thing, balancing all these egos, and Idol Camp does an admirable job. The staff doles out praise like lollipops, and even the pitchiest of openmic performances earns raves from fellow campers. "Our goal was to create a supportive environment," says Milani Luther, a Montessori-school principal with a T-shirt that reads *KINDNESS REGARDLESS*. Unlike the show, she says, "Idol Camp is not a competition": There are no auditions, no voting and no such thing as a bottom three.

Then again, we're talking about a bunch of ambitious, hyperdramatic teens. "There's competition *everywhere*," says Savanna, 14, as she braids a friendship bracelet. "The girls are the worst. They act nice, but behind your back ..."

In some ways, Savanna is the anti-Georgia. She plays guitar in a rock band, loves the Ramones and System of a Down,

and wears skull-and-crossbones Vans. She dyes her blond hair black, to match her fingernails. She's not much of an *Idol* fan—"I've seen like one episode"—but she paid for camp out of her college money because she wants to learn to sing better.

"At first I thought I was going to hate it here," she says. "The two girls I met on the plane were like, 'Oh, my God! I shop! I cheer-lead!' That's so not me. But I've met some really awesome people."

On Saturday, the moms and dads arrive for the big inspirational final show. Its messages are simple: Be yourself. Work hard. Take risks. Support each other. And never, ever, stop following your dreams. (Also, don't forget to tune into *Idol* season seven, starting in January on Fox.) Paula would love it, and the parents seem delighted. "There's nothing better than seeing kids having good, clean fun," beams a grandmother who flew in from Kentucky. The finale gets a standing ovation, and the kids soak it up. Some people wait a lifetime for a moment like this. Others, until junior high.

At sunset, the kids gather on a hillside for one last campfire. It's full of sweet moments: inside jokes, ghost stories, reminiscences about that funny thing from three days ago. Lots of people cry. Nobody

wants to say goodbye.

"Do we have any s'mores?" someone asks.

"No," says a counselor, "but we have S'mores Pop-Tarts ..."



BACK HOME IN Texas, Georgia is glad she went ... mostly. "I learned a lot about teamwork," she says. "But the classes weren't really on my level. I'm not saying everyone else sucked—you could just tell who had it and who didn't." Overall, she pronounces it "more 'fun' than 'professional.'"

Next summer, after she finishes 10th grade, she and her mom may move to New York. They'll be closer to agents that way, and more available for auditions. She'll also be 16 by then—old enough to try out for *American Idol*. She's not sure yet which song she'll sing: "It used to be 'Fallin,'" by Alicia Keys, but Simon hates that song."

We ask where she sees herself in five years. "Definitely on the charts," she nods. "World tour, Super Bowl, all that good stuff. Helping children. Starting a charity."

As for the possibility of failure? "I've thought about it, but not seriously," she says. "I believe in myself too much. I just hope everyone else does, too." [BLENDER]

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The Trio is the Neapolitan ice cream of home audio—it's three speakers (left, right and center) in one. \$1,000; paradigm.com

WARDROBE STYLING: NINA FISHER FOR JUDY CASEY; PROP STYLING: EYAL BAUGH FOR ARTWING; GROOMING: LISA RAQUEL FOR SEE MANAGEMENT AND STACY SKINNER FOR ARTWING; CLOTHING: JACKET, J. LINDBERG; SHIRT: CUSTO BARCELONA; PANTS: JOHN VARVATOS

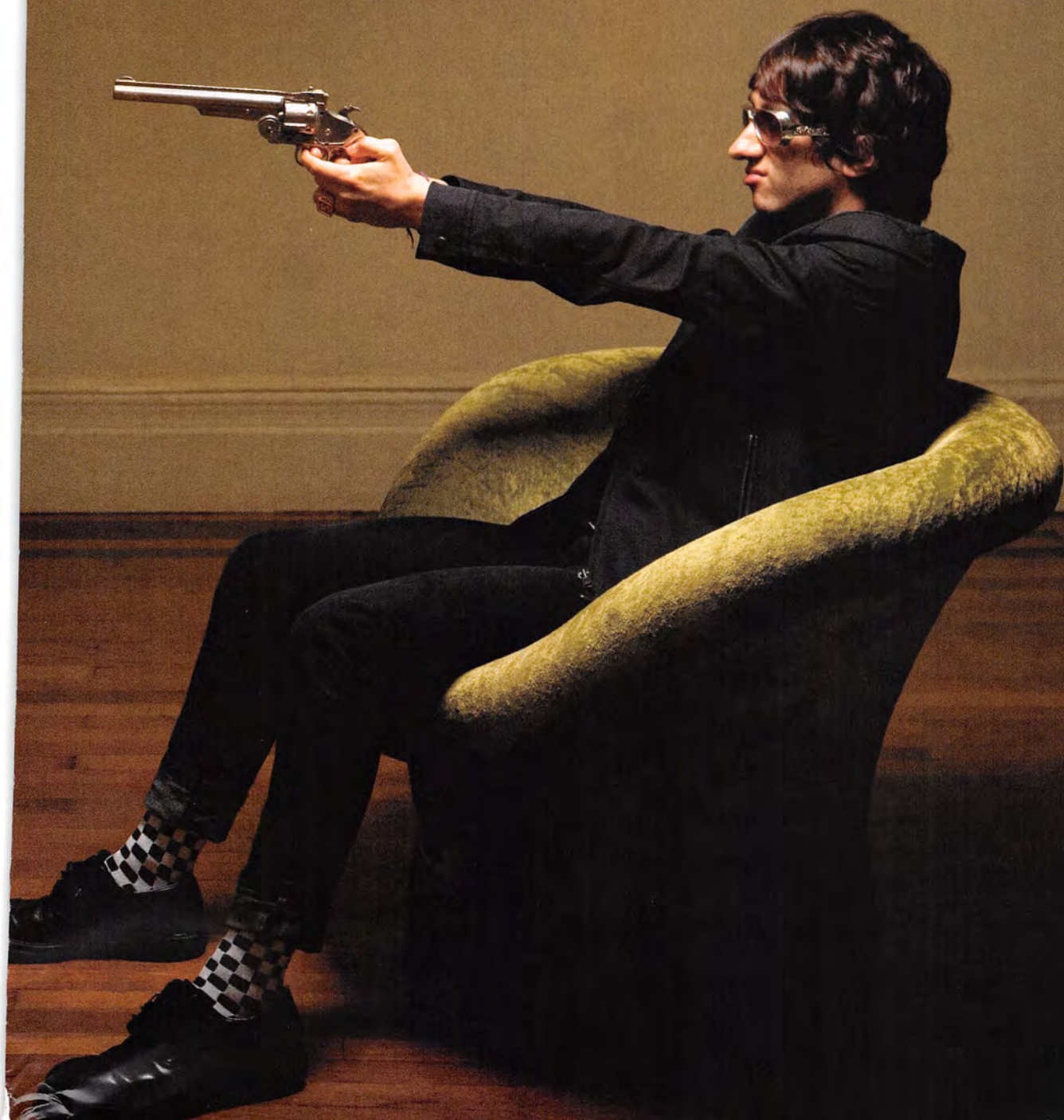
SCREENS POPPIN'

GEAR
GUIDE
FALL '07

Chart-toppers **PLAIN WHITE T'S** put the season's coolest flat-screen TVs to the test

By JOHN MIHALY and JON COPLON

Photographs by DAVID HARRY STEWART



**1 SHARP AQUOS
LC-32D43U
32-INCH LCD**

With Sharp's Black TFT low-reflection coating, no matter how much sunlight hits the screen, you'll always see the picture clearly—a feature that will come in handy if you ever move out of your parents' basement.

\$1,100; sharpusa.com

**2 PANASONIC
TH-50PZ750U
50-INCH PLASMA**

This Panasonic series reproduces colors just as they appear on the monitors used in fancy Hollywood film-editing suites—so you'll be able to enjoy the sight of human viscera in the exact hues Eli Roth intended.

\$4,000; panasonic.com

**3 SAMSUNG LN-T3253H
32-INCH LCD**

If your Halo 3 skills aren't what they could be, don't despair: Samsung has teamed up with Microsoft to develop Game Mode, which boosts sound, image quality and—very important when it comes to those lightning-quick fragfests—onscreen response times.

\$1,100; samsung.com

**4 JVC LT-47X788
47-INCH LCD**

(SEE PAGE 96)

**5 BOSE IN-EAR
HEADPHONES**

These high-quality buds come with small, medium and large silicone covers, guaranteeing a snug fit for all size earholes.

\$100; bose.com

**6 AUDIOVOX FPE4207HR
42-INCH LCD**

Does all this talk of special features and weird acronyms leave you scratching your head? To keep it simple, check out this Audiovox. It's got 1080p resolution (trust us, you want that) and dual HDMI inputs (um, you can plug stuff into it).

\$2,000; audiovox.com

Walk this way (from left): Tim Lopez, Higgenson, Dave Tirio, Mike Retondo and De'Mar Hamilton.



3

4

5

6

SHIRLEY CLARKE
1933-1977

SIR ARTHUR C. CLARKE
1917-2007

YIP HUI THOMSON
1913-2007



1

2

3

The Plain White T's sex tape—coming soon to a P2P site near you.

1 PIONEER ELITE KURO PRO-II50HD 50-INCH PLASMA

Based on the signal it's receiving, Pioneer's plasma set can differentiate between news, cartoons, sports and (on the rare occasion MTV plays them) music videos, optimizing the picture accordingly.

\$4,500; pioneerelectronics.com

2 KLIPSCH iGROOVE SXT IPOD SPEAKER

This lightweight and stylish iPod speaker is the perfect complement to your "jet-set"—a.k.a. "couch-surfing"—lifestyle.

\$170; klipsch.com

3 CANON HR10 HD CAMCORDER

Canon's tiny wonder records hi-def video directly to a DVD. Hopefully your straight-to-DVD movies will be better than *Leprechaun 4: In Space*.

\$1,200; usa.canon.com

4 LG 37LB5D 37-INCH LCD

LG's viewing angle of 178 degrees means that even if you're stuck on the far end of the couch, you can still get a crystal-clear view of Wayne Brady chastising forgetful karaoke singers.

\$2,000; lgusa.com

5 MOTOROLA RAZR² V9M

This even-slimmer follow-up to the iconic RAZR boasts Crystal-Talk technology, which ensures you can hear your buddy on the other end of the line—even when you're nattering away in a noisy rock club.

\$250 with two-year contract; motorola.com

6 ALTEC LANSING INMOTION iMT525 BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

Listening to your MP3s on your cell phone's tinny little speakers sucks. Blast your tunes through this Bluetooth-enabled wireless speaker instead.

\$130; alteclansing.com

TV party tonight: Bassist Retondo cleans up real nice.



"We are so going to fire our interior decorator."

PLAIN WHITE T'S

Near-fatal van crashes! Deceitful girls! Rihanna! Nothing can stop emo's latest stars

By MARK YARM



"THE FACT THAT I lived was just ridiculous," says Tom Higgenson, frontman for Chicago-based fivesome Plain White T's, as he coolly recounts the most formative experience of his life over lunch at a tiny Middle Eastern restaurant in New York. "Everything just happened so perfectly." The 28-year-old singer pauses. "As perfect as a horrific car accident can be."

In 1999, Higgenson—whose name you probably don't know, but whose band's ubiquitous summer ballad "Hey There Delilah" you likely do—was driving his van on I-88 in Illinois when another motorist cut him off. Higgenson swerved and lost control of his vehicle, which proceeded to flip over about eight times. Being young and irresponsible surely saved the singer's life: Without a seat belt to restrain him, he was flung out the van's side door and onto the highway's grassy median; the van, meanwhile, was totaled.

"NOW WHEN I WRITE A LOVE SONG, I ACTUALLY MEAN IT." TOM HIGGENSON

Higgenson fractured three vertebrae, ruptured his kidney, lungs and liver, and required three months of rehabilitation to learn how to walk again. Imbued with a newfound sense of mortality, he decided to start writing more personal lyrics for his fledgling band: "Until then, it was just, 'This word rhymes with this.' I wasn't giving away anything about myself."

Today, no one would accuse Higgenson of not sharing. On the Plain White T's 2006 major-label debut, *Every Second Counts*, he earnestly details his romantic experiences, including the indignities suffered at the hands of girls given to deceit and drunk-dialing.

More optimistic is "Hey There Delilah," an unabashedly sentimental love letter to a girlfriend away at college in New York. But it turns out the song is largely fictional: Five years ago, Higgenson met a New York college student named Delilah DiCrescenzo—now a Columbia University graduate and Olympic track hopeful—but she was dating another guy at the time and rebuffed the singer's advances. The two met in person just once more (and exchanged some online banter about the hit he was going to write about her) before Higgenson finally presented his still-spoken-for muse with the completed song in late 2004. ("It was so beautifully written," DiCrescenzo has said. "There was pressure to live up to this ideal. I didn't know how to be polite but, you know, ditch him.")

Although "Delilah" had already appeared on the T's 2005 independent release, *All That We Needed*, and a subsequent indie EP, it was added as a bonus track to *Every Second Counts* in February at the behest of the label in an effort to build on the song's popularity. The band—whose other members are guitarists Dave Tirio and Tim Lopez, bassist Mike Retondo and drummer De'Mar Hamilton—was initially resistant, but today they have no regrets: In July, the tune knocked Rihanna's "Umbrella," the all-but-official song of the summer, off the top of *Billboard's* Hot 100. "We've spent so much of our career traveling in a van—Rihanna probably never did that," Lopez says. "So it's like David and Goliath. It's a pretty amazing feeling for us to take out someone like that."

And Higgenson thinks he has more potential Rihanna-slayers in him. He's been busy writing songs about his girlfriend of one year, a Mexican-American beauty named Angie who bears more than a passing resemblance to Delilah. ("I even told Angie, 'You guys look a little bit similar,'" the singer says. "She didn't really like that.") Being in a committed relationship "will make my new songs more meaningful," Higgenson insists. "'Delilah' was an infatuation turned into an imaginary love song. Now when I write a love song, I actually mean it." [BLENDER]



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MYA

The R&B star sings about liberation a lot, but she's a slave to formula on her new CD.

★★½

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

KICK OUT THE JAM

Different visions of hippie bliss and '60s experimentation inspire two whack-job records (By JON PARELES)

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE

STRAWBERRY JAM ★★★★★

DOMINO

DEVENDRA BANHART

SMOKEY ROLLS DOWN THUNDER CANYON ★★★

XL

WAS IT THE shaggy hair, the rainbow clothes and the glassy-eyed smiles that made hippies so sweet in the '60s yet so obnoxious in retrospect? Well, yes, but it was also some-

thing more: a real, fragile innocence coupled with a deliberate embrace of the childlike. Hippie naivete encouraged whimsical imagination; it also led to all sorts of stoned self-indulgence, from feedback jams to would-be revolutionary cults.

Forty years after the Summer of Love, there's prosperity in America and an interminable war abroad, not to mention baby boomers still prattling about the good old daze. It's no wonder a new generation still >>



Animal Collective: If you stop picking at them, they'll clear up.

mines the '60s. One cluster of musicians fascinated by the psychedelic era is a loose coalition of freak-folk songwriters who revere cult acts that mingled fingerpicking acoustic parables and spacey production. Freak-folk spans long-haired troubadours like Devendra Banhart, 26, and mad-cap studio kooks like Animal Collective (along with chamber-pop projects such as Espers and mystical introverts like Joanna Newsom). Unlike their inspirations, who strove to "be here now," the youngsters do look back—but to an era that appears more like a refuge than the upheaval it was. And knowing they can't magically revert to '60s innocence doesn't stop them from chasing the whimsy.

On new albums, Banhart goes self-consciously retro and Animal Collective charges into a sonic wilderness. Banhart's 2002 debut sounded like a pure emanation from the paisley era, full of acoustic-guitar reveries about nature in unhinged song structures. But regular touring brought out Banhart's shticky side—yes, he called his band Hairy Fairy—and on *Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon*, he dilutes the cosmic ruminations with put-ons and direct nostalgia. He concocts broad, winking parodies like

the bubblegum funk of "Lover" and the Doors-y jam "Seahorse." And like Bright Eyes on *Cassadaga*, he also revives some string-laden '60s easy listening. Could this trend end now, please?

The mimicry isn't a pop move. Freak-folk was a barely commercial zone of '60s music, and some new Banhart tracks suggest a newer niche that's not exactly popular either: Latin alternative rock. Three songs have Spanish lyrics (Banhart's mother is Venezuelan), and another is in Portuguese. The album may hold a concept somewhere about America and the New World, and another about the female narrators in "Bad Girl" and "The Other Woman"—boy, does Banhart savor his androgynous croon. But coherence dissolves over the album's sprawl of 72 minutes and 16 songs. Banhart can still be quietly metaphysical now and then, yet too often he settles for a less lovable tie-dyed legacy: cutesiness.

While Banhart counterfeits the '60s, Animal Collective go for distinctively 21st-century hallucinations: free-associative lyrics and manic computerized arrangements headed for a dimension all their own. The four-man band from Brooklyn flies its freak flag by aiming for sensory overload.

Strawberry Jam doesn't jam. Instead, it loops, joyful and relentless. When Animal Collective was picking acoustic guitars, they sounded folky even when they were busily manipulating tape. But lately—as in solo projects like drummer Panda Bear's dense *Person Pitch*, released earlier this year—the band has embraced keyboards, percussion, guitar distortion and a breathless, mechanized pace.

The music can sound like a calliope, Lou Reed's roiling *Metal Machine Music*, a hypnotic Philip Glass opera sped up or—when Collective members let their falsettos fly—a whooping elementary-school sing-along. The melodies themselves would be simple enough for folk tunes, as the band members sing (and sometimes scream) about songwriting, family, depression and death. "Life was good, now death's all wrong/Cause you can't feel a thing," Avey Tare declares in "Cuckoo Cuckoo."

Yet underneath the semi-comprehensible babble is a band of crafty New York minimalists, stacking pattern on pattern. The blend of organization—even the oddest, most precarious combinations of instruments sync up—and derangement is Animal Collective's version 2.0 of hippie whimsy, and it's quite a buzz.

DOWNLOAD:

Devendra Banhart: "My Dearest Friend," "So Long Old Bean," "Rosa"

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE: "Chores," "For Reverend Green," "Fireworks"

THE SCORE



CLASSIC



GREAT



GOOD



MEDIOCRE



FOUL

BIFFY CLYRO

PUZZLE ★★☆☆½

ROADRUNNER

Horribly named Scottish trio catapult into an opening slot for the Rolling Stones



Three albums of spunky, Weezer-indebted rock failed to signal Biffy Clyro as

breakout stars in waiting, but *Puzzle* has already changed that, debuting at No. 2 in the U.K. and marking the emergence of a proprietary sound. Pretentious song titles, Storm Thorgerson artwork and Muse support slots are consistent with their progressive-rock dynamics ("Living Is a Problem Because Everything Dies" starts with a minute of portentous noise blasts, then a choir), but sturdy songwriting and singer-guitarist Simon Neil's wounded tough-guy yearning keep things appealingly unhistrionic. "The Conversation Is ..." chimes with endorphin-rush guitars, "As Dust Dances" is a slow-burning neo-grunge ballad ideal for Zippo-waving, and the whole manages to rock hard and spring surprises in equal measure.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: "Saturday Superhouse," "The Conversation Is ..." "As Dust Dances"

BLAQK AUDIO

CXCELLS ★

INTERSCOPE

Half of AFI live out their new-wave dreams. The results are nightmarish

Davey Havok and Jade Puget of AFI like Depeche Mode. A lot. So much, in fact, that they've taken temporary leave of their day jobs as top-notch screamo peddlers to indulge their inner disco-goths and make an entire album in the style of their heroes. And by "in the style of," we mean "slavishly and shamelessly ripping them off." Oh, sure, on overblown tracks like "Stiff Kittens" and "Snuff on Digital," Puget's phalanx of synths and samplers grind and toot appropriately, and Havok



Banhart: "Me? Creepy?"

howls genre-suitable pablum about desecrating sanctuaries and "digital omniscient eyes" (really!), but the overall effect is chillingly inept, concrete proof of the yawning divide between fandom and inspiration. Imitation this painfully sincere is anything but flattering.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: None

JAMES BLUNT

ALL THE LOST SOULS ☆☆☆

CUSTARD/ATLANTIC

The newling soundtrack to tomorrow's weddings ... today!

Without his debut single, "You're Beautiful," James Blunt would be just another British singer-songwriter with love trouble on his mind. But that piano-led lament—armed with the sort of refrain you'd expect to emanate from the tummy of a cuddle toy—made Blunt's plaintive wheedle ubiquitous, driving sales of his first album past 11 million worldwide. Success on that scale can be a trap, and with this overwrought follow-up Blunt walks right in: Though the single "1973" suggests he's capable of more inventive stuff, he devotes himself largely to unremarkable romance chronicles and blandly competent hooks. Seven of the 10 tunes are solemn processions that say little as they swell to majestic heights. On one, Blunt seizes up with passion, envisioning a day when he and a friend "can maybe talk and not just speak." If only he could apply that to his songwriting.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD: "1973"

KENNY CHESNEY

JUST WHO I AM: POETS & PIRATES

☆☆☆

BNA

Muscled country superstar finally scores, despite a distressingly Jimmy Buffett-like album title

It feels like a record assembled by focus group. Each track on Kenny Chesney's 10th studio album targets a different member of his demographic: happily married born-again, lonely guys who *wish* they had families, party boys who love a good one-night stand, working-class grunts, even single moms supporting their kids (by being strippers, no less). His previous CDs were drippy, by-the-numbers country-rock, but now, singing in a voice that

reveals new depth, Chesney effortlessly inhabits each character, and the best tracks finally find a middle ground between honky-tonk and Def Leppard. For every piece of hokum (the blue-collar novelty "Shiftwork," whose wordplay is corny even by Nashville standards), he puts across a power ballad and some good-fun arena country (a cover of Dwight Yoakam's "Wild Ride"). And, thankfully, there are no songs about poets or pirates.

DAVID BROWNE

DOWNLOAD: "Wild Ride," "You Scare Me," "Never Wanted Nothing More"

STEVE EARLE

WASHINGTON SQUARE SERENADE

☆☆☆☆

NEW WEST

Best songwriter of his generation ditches the South, moves up North and, uh, raps

Steve Earle wouldn't dream of leaving Nashville for New York without a zinger. "Goodbye, guitar town," he exults in "Tennessee Blues," kissing off the city that never knew what to do with him. His 12th studio album abounds with new directions: Seventh

wife Allison Moorer lends vocal support, while producer (and Dust Brother) John King coaxes Earle to semi-rap, nervily amplifies the hollow-body buzz of the guitars and then complements it all with shuffling electronic beats. But for all the paeans to Earle's new metropolis—"City of Immigrants" features Forro in the Dark, an NYC band that puts a weird rock spin on Brazilian music—this album feels strangely like a homecoming. If the bravado of his magnificent 1986 debut, *Guitar Town*, has been tempered, its earnest



I LOVE THIS CD!
ZAC EFRON

AMY WINEHOUSE
BACK TO BLACK
UNIVERSAL/REPUBLIC

"I saw her perform live, and she is a badass. I dug her tattoos and her demeanor, the way she interacts with people. She's hardcore. I am not afraid of strong women."

The Go! Team:
"Ha-hah!
Missed us!"



Blaqk Audio:
"They were pink
when we put them
in the wash."



innocence stays triumphantly intact: "Sparkle and Shine" and "Come Home to Me" are the kind of Beatlesque fool-for-love tearjerkers Earle has specialized in for decades. Movement and change remain his inspiration.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: "Down Here Below," "Jericho Road," "Days Aren't Long Enough"

EXTRA GOLDEN

HERA MA NONO ☆☆☆½

THRILL JOCKEY

East Africa meets East Coast on a joyful album that also serves as a memorial

The 2005 AIDS-related death of Extra Golden cofounder Otieno Jagwasi shades the follow-up to last year's rough yet lovable *Ok-Oyot System*, where D.C.-based Alex Minoff and Ian Eagleson ambitiously applied indie-rock deviation to the Benga beats of Kenyan music. Benga star Opiyo Bilongo joined the band for

a U.S. tour facilitated by Sen. Barack Obama (praised here in "Obama"), then stuck around for this smooth blend of upbeat Afropop guitar grooves and downbeat Luo and English lyrics sung to minor-key melodies. "Hera Ma Nono" means "love in vain" in Luo, and while romantic betrayal is the subject of both the title track and "Love Hijackers," a greater existential disappointment fills the sadly moving "Brothers Gone Away" and "Jakolando," the latter sung by Otieno's own brother.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD: "Jakolando," "Brothers Gone Away"

THE GO! TEAM

PROOF OF YOUTH ☆☆☆

SUB POP

From Brighton, England, a six-piece band that sees only the happy! side of life

Go! Team songwriter Ian Parton lives on a Sesame Street of his own creation, where >>

PITY THE FOO

Dave Grohl still screams himself raw—but why?

FOO FIGHTERS

ECHOES, SILENCE, PATIENCE & GRACE ⓈⓈ½

ROSWELL/RCA

DAVE GROHL IS the Bob Seger of alternative rock: a solid workhorse—a Clydesdale, even—churning out highly proficient hits that define the unadventurous mainstream of its era. For Seger in the 1970s, it was a gruff, working-class mix of soul and boogie. For Grohl and his Silver Foo Band, the formula, stuck to steadfastly over a half-dozen albums, is angst-y, vein-bulging pop and punk, with every sweat-stained new release becoming a little harder to distinguish from its predecessors.

Returning to Gil Norton, who produced the exciting and bummed-out *The Colour and the Shape* a decade ago, Foo Fighters seem willfully anachronistic, a meat-and-potatoes Classic Rock band at a time when 1980s electropop is considered deep heritage. The album kicks off in familiar territory with “The Pretender” and “Let It Die,” gut-punch manifestations of Grohl’s stock topic of angry defiance in the face of mortality. “Beautiful veins and bloodshot eyes/Why’d you have to go and let it die?” he screams over high-tension guitars and a steady, proto-emo churn. Throughout, the Foons are as tight as ever, even if the songs are mostly unmemorable; “My Hero” and “Everlong” have no peers here.

Things go awry when tried-and-true tricks give way to an unironic parade of the hoariest gimmicks of old-time rock & roll. There’s a spot-the-cliché drinking game to be played here, from the supremely mellow Alan Parsons Project harmonies of “Erase/Replace” to noodling acoustic duels and even a Segeresque “one last cigarette” sucked down in pensive loneliness. The ominous grunge-folk of “Summer’s End” (“I had that dream again that the sun was dead”) is an exception, echoing Neil Young with imagination and taste, and not a whiff of dull déjà vu.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: “Summer’s End”

DAVE GROHL'S CURRENT LISTENING

CELTIC FROST
MONOTHEIST CENTURY MEDIA

THE ZOMBIES
ODESSEY AND ORACLE FUEL 2000



Dave Grohl loves a good drummer joke.



Polly Jean Harvey: No relation to Steve Harvey.

Double Dutch teams jump rope to early hip-hop and fledgling girl groups practice Motown dance moves as *Animal from the Muppets* bashes away on drums. Less dependent on samples, but nevertheless busier and way louder than their debut three years ago, *Proof* postulates a multigenerational childhood utopia where everyone’s happiness meter remains in the red. Rather than homogenizing his sources, Parton rubs them against each other: Despite their seeming differences, marching-band trumpets and Public Enemy’s Chuck D spark a teenage riot of wide-eyed wonder on “Flashlight Fight.” He’s put into practice his own literal concept of sonic youth—innocents high on a citified curiosity in every sound, played all at once.

BARRY WALTERS
DOWNLOAD: “Doing It Right,” “Flashlight Fight,” “Grip Like a Vice”

THE GOOD LIFE

HELP WANTED NIGHTS ⓈⓈⓈ½

SADDLE CREEK

Sardonic emo pioneer gets introspective, turns down the volume

DUDE GOT DUMPED

Tim Kasher, who helped launch the Omaha emo scene in the mid-'90s alongside a pubescent

Conor Oberst, reserves his most tortured material for his main band *Cursive*. This spin-off project, now on its fourth full-length

release, showcases his quieter, more reflective side. Kasher loves concept albums—on the *Good Life*’s 2004 release *Album of the Year*, he chronicled

ASTONISHING FACT!

In 1999, Tim Kasher of THE GOOD LIFE sold Beanie Babies on the black market to make a living and buy a tour van.

a calendar year, one track for each month—and he’s also a master of the breakup-song cycle. Almost every one of these twangy, homespun gems finds him in the heat of romantic battle—taunting, eviscerating or pleading with a lover or an ex. Kasher calls *Help Wanted Nights* an imaginary soundtrack for a screenplay he’s written. No surprise, given the perversely boozy clarity of these after-hours vignettes, that it takes place in a small-town dive bar.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: “Heartbroke,” “Keely Aimee”

PJ HARVEY

WHITE CHALK ⓈⓈⓈ

ISLAND

Trading guitar firestorms for keyboard atmospherics, Polly Jean Harvey dozes off and has some gorgeous nightmares

After 15 years as Britain’s darkling blues fury, Polly Jean Harvey is summoning the power of quiet. Refining the spare sound of her last studio album *Uh Huh Her*, she herein presents an 11-part song cycle about loss, longing and wandering bereft through the moors. Producers Harvey, Flood and John Parish blend a quiet handful of instruments—piano, mandolin, the drums of the Dirty Three’s Jim White—into an immersive backdrop >>



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— STEPHEN WILLIAMS, *NEWSDAY*

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Kevin Michael, having a bad(ass) hair day.

THE CD WE'RE TOTALLY GAY FOR

KEVIN MICHAEL

KEVIN MICHAEL ★★☆☆

DOWNTOWN/ATLANTIC

Justin Timberlake, meet your new competition



HE'S GOT A funky 'fro. He dresses in chic boho gear. He trills skater references in a flawless falsetto, complemented by cameos from alternative rappers like Lupe Fiasco and Q-Tip. But never mind the familiar trappings, 22-year-old Kevin Michael is not so much neosoul as Ne-Yo soul—an

irresistible blend of deliciously commercial R&B and classy, retro-flavored funk. Whether jamming about his "weekend jump-off," bemoaning the fact that he "ain't got you" or waxing theoretical about being mixed race, Michael never shies away from going pop, and the results are spectacular: Every hook on his stellar debut is instantly alluring. There are sound-alike moments here—"Liquid Lava Love" has Prince written all over it, and "Ha Ha Ha" might've been a Robin Thicke joint—but when they sound so supremely funky, the sense of imitation can't dampen the pleasure.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "It Don't Make Any Difference to Me," "If I Ain't Got You," "Ghost"

for Harvey, who uses the frail parts of her voice to evoke the inner life of someone blunted by emotional extremes. Even a sunny little album-opening keyboard darkens within seconds of her entrance—"Soon as I'm/Left/All alone ..."—and in an eerie, unnatural, childlike tremor, she teeters on the verge of some torrential meltdown. And then come nearly flawless mountain-death songs from the limestone hills of Dorset, U.K.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "White Chalk," "Grow Grow Grow," "When Under Ether"

HIGH ON FIRE

DEATH IS THIS COMMUNION

★★★☆☆

RELAPSE

Oakland metal lords take a pass on fearing the reaper

High on Fire are often pegged as doom or stoner metal, but the trio's fourth full-length is free of sludge and haze. More important, it's sharp and in your face, like a scimitar. They've climbed out of the bog of earlier recordings and entered a baleful light—brooding low-end, crisp licks and driving martial beats.

Matt Pike growls about sacrifice and Babylonian goddesses with controlled ferocity, while his guitar ranges from crystalline melodies (the instrumental "DII") to puzzling avant-garde acoustic intros ("Cycloplan Scape"). As the sword-'n'-sorcery cover art suggests, *High on Fire* are high on atmosphere. But like a great first-person shooter, the spooky mood always serves the action.

ERIK DAVIS

DOWNLOAD: "Death Is This Communion," "DII," "Cycloplan Scape"

HIM

VENUS DOOM ★★☆☆½

SIRE

For these smooth Finns, love bites

Brutal. Ballsy. *Extreme*. These are the kinds of words normally pressed into service when describing hard rock.

Sultry and suave?

Not so much. But with HIM, the Finnish group that for more than a decade has specialized in a gothic grind they characterize as "love metal," you might

even sneak in a *sexy* and still be on point. Their riffs pack the wallop of Black Sabbath and "Black Album"-era Metallica, and the ethereal keyboards that gave the album's predecessor, *Dark Light*, an unctuous sheen have largely been replaced by guitarist Linde Lindström's furious shredding. Still, it's perpetually heartsick frontman Ville Valo's vampiric crooning that gives this band its fangs. So when he lets loose a rare scream on "Love in Cold Blood," it's a downer. Dude: We know you've come to suck our blood, but at least have the courtesy to romance us first!

TOM BEAUJOUR

DOWNLOAD: "Passion's Killing Floor," "Dead Lovers' Lane"

ASTONISHING FACT!

In 1998, *HOT HOT HEAT* lived and rehearsed in a Victoria, B.C., house that had formerly been used as a crack den.

HOT HOT HEAT

HAPPINESS LTD. ★★☆☆

SIRE

Former next-big-things hit pre-midlife midlife crises

Maturity can be one of the worst things to happen to a rock band—just look at this Canadian quartet's quick trajectory from gawky to snooze-y. On their 2002 breakthrough, *Make Up the Breakdown*, Hot Hot Heat came off like Ritalin-deprived adolescents; three years later, on *Elevator*, they sanded away their eccentricities to reveal a slicker neo-new-wave template. Now, on only their third major-label release, they sound almost middle-aged. Yelping frontman Steve Bays still has a voice like a panic attack, but it no longer fits the songs. Even the most hopped-

up numbers, which lack the antsy rhythms and wise-guy wordplay of their predecessors, give off a hint of boredom. And the doomed attempts to stretch—like "Outta

Heart," an overwrought ballad complete with orchestra and choir—smell more of desperation than risk.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Harmonicas & Tambourines"

BETTYE LAVETTE

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME ★★☆☆

ANTI-

Southern rockers help a soul legend settle the score



Bettye LaVette is no ordinary soul shouter. She's a genuine interpreter, able to shift

seamlessly from conversational to blazingly intense. After her remarkable 2005 comeback album, *I've Got My Own Hell to Raise*, the big surprise on the 61-year-old's follow-up isn't her knockout voice—it's the sympathetic backup provided by Lynyrd Skynyrd-worshippers Drive-By Truckers (whose guitarist, Patterson Hood, produced the record). The well-selected, never-obvious covers of songs by writers from Elton John to Willie Nelson are unflinching tales of struggle and survival. The album's title provides one key to her fervor: In 1972, LaVette cut her debut LP at Muscle Shoals, Alabama's historic FAME studio, but her label scrapped



I LOVE THIS CD!
WILMER VALDERRAMA

THE FRATELLIS
COSTELLO MUSIC
FALLOUT/DROP THE GUN/ISLAND

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the project without explanation. Thirty-five years later, she went back to Muscle Shoals and burned the place down.

ALAN LIGHT

DOWNLOAD: "Somebody Pick Up My Pieces," "Talking Old Soldiers"

ANNIE LENNOX

SONGS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

☆☆☆½

ARISTA

Ex-Eurythmics singer and cool '80s superstar sounds on the verge of a nervous breakdown

Annie Lennox is a paradoxical diva. Her voice is cool, regal and self-possessed, yet the majority of her songs express fear, rage, uncertainty and profound bitterness. The contradiction has become glaring now, with Lennox in a desperate funk: lonely, betrayed by men, worried about aging, fighting off suicidal thoughts. "I've seen too much/I know too much/I hurt too much/I feel too much," she cries in "Ghosts in My Machine," a song in which she also declares "Woman-

kind was born for pain." Throughout, her feminist self-determination is at war with her aching desire for a man. Produced by Glen Ballard (Alanis Morissette), the music is dominated by the same pounding pop-disco beats and thick textures that have defined all her records. But now, Lennox sounds like she's been rubbed raw by life.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

DOWNLOAD: "Dark Road," "Coloured Bedspread"

MANU CHAO

LA RADIOLINA ☆☆☆

NACIONAL/BECAUSE

A European master of mash-up pop gleefully tells U.S. imperialists where to stick it

Manu Chao is a radical troubadour for a flat world. The Paris-born, Barcelona-dwelling global-pop insurgent plays multilingual "merry blues" with an elastic optimism rare among lefties (the Spanish title of his 2001 career-best translates to "Next Station: Hope"). The 21 songs on his fourth album whir by like overlapping



Annie Lennox: A cougar at rest.

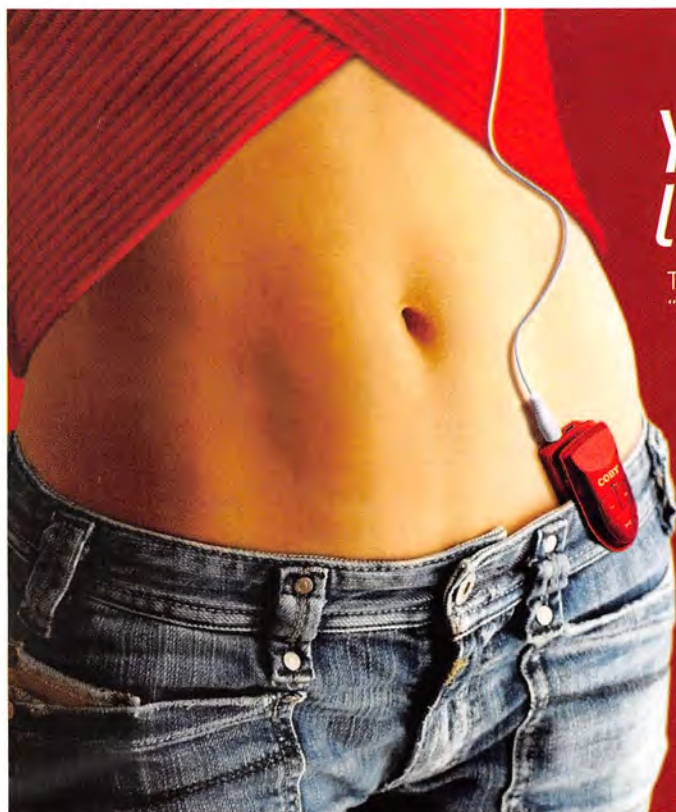
Web-radio dispatches from Chiapas, Berkeley or Kinshasa. Dusty folk ballads and ska-punk, Tijuana brass and digital reggae blur together under one message: Yanqui go home. Chao's jovial, chatty, Spanish-English-French crooning helps the ADD sensibility flow into something that feels like a happy incantation rather than

a protester's harangue against George Bush. His '80s band Mano Negra aspired to be a Latin Clash; here he suggests something more profound: a Woody Guthrie for our borderless age.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "Tristeza Maleza," "Rain in Paradize," "The Bleedin Clown" >>

LENNOX: MIKE OWEN & MARK LANGTHORNE



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HORSE WHISPERER

Imaginary beasts still plague Scot's tart love songs

KT TUNSTALL

DRASTIC FANTASTIC **☆☆☆** 1/2

RELENTLESS/VIRGIN

IN "BLACK HORSE and the Cherry Tree," KT Tunstall's surrealistic breakout hit from 2005, she has an ambivalent encounter with a talking animal. "Hey, lady, will you marry me?" blurts the beast, and though she declines in horror, Tunstall can't help but second-guess her own heart: Maybe getting with a horse is better than being left with nothing, "a hole for all the world to see."

On a strong second album that proves her success was no fluke, this 32-year-old Scottish singer-songwriter reveals romantic worries with breezy candor, her ringing folk-pop shaded with blues and her voice just raspy enough to hint that she has lost in love more than once. This time, her animal oracle is a bird whose pure white feathers are dipped in tar. "Half of you is heavenly," she sings in awe. "The rest of you is from the street." For Tunstall, free flight is always fraught with sticky, earthy complications, and even the surest thing is in doubt. In "Little Favours," the haunting opening track, a cuddling session is set against a dissonant acoustic jangle, her favorite and

most effective riff. When she requests of her lover, "Take me far away/And hold me close to your heart," it's clear she might not get her wish.

With short, hummable hooks and spare arrangements, the sleekness of Tunstall's songs contrasts with the knotty desires of her protagonists. In "Hold On," the first single—snappy and dark, it's a worthy follow-up to "Black Horse"—she denies that she's merely "searching the land/For a hero of a man," but she's painfully aware that she can't say *what* she's looking for. The clarity of her frustration gives the songs an unsparing honesty, but it's also frustrating to witness: Every relationship is tainted, and no itch is fully scratched. Surely the bird and the horse have much more satisfying sex lives.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: "Hold On," "Little Favours," "If Only"

KT TUNSTALL'S CURRENT LISTENING

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NEON BIBLE MERGE

WILLY MASON
IF THE OCEAN GETS ROUGH GRANDMA'S BASEMENT/ASTRALWERKS

"Now where did I leave that hat?"



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Johnathan Rice:
"This episode of *Ugly Betty* really turns me on."

MOTION CITY SOUNDTRACK

EVEN IF IT KILLS ME ★★★

EPITAPH

Minnesota geeks fight emo, crime and scurvy on album three

Every generation needs a Weezer—a group of gangly, often-bespectacled nerds able to let some of the air out of a glum underground scene—and Motion City Soundtrack is the Weezer of emo. Underneath his architecturally impressive hair, front guy Justin Pierre is a savvy melodic songwriter and, refreshingly, he's completely incapable of taking himself seriously. "Let's fight crime with mangoes and limes and join the PGA!" he croons on the bouncy standout "It Had to Be You." Throughout, pedigreed pop-savant coproducers Ric Ocasek (the

Cars) and Adam Schlesinger (Fountains of Wayne) drench Pierre's wacky digressions with liberal doublings of '80s keyboards and woo-woo backing vocals. Keep Pierre away from applying to Harvard, and it'll be smooth sailing.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: "If Had to Be You," "Calling All Cops"

MYA

LIBERATION ★★½

UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

D.C. singer gets deadeningly desperate on album No. 4

Like Oprah-endorsed best sellers, R&B albums go big on self-expression and personal growth. On her first album for a new label, Mya Harrison talks a lot about liberation. But given the long delay of this record, originally scheduled for release last fall (and the ruthless erasure of flop single "Ayo" from the restructured version), lyrics like "Tonight I'll be your waitress, your mistress," sound downright needy. A decade into her career, two songs raise the 27-year-old's game—the insidious snake-charmer melody of "Walka Not a Talka" and the bracing blast of betrayed-housewife rage of "All in the Name of Love"—while Charli Baltimore and Lil Wayne earn their guest-spot paychecks on "I Am" and "Lock U

Down." Elsewhere, boilerplate slow jams and generic sass paint Mya, her claims to the contrary, as a talka not a walka.

DORIAN LYNKEY

DOWNLOAD: "Walka Not a Talka," "All in the Name of Love"

JOHNATHAN RICE

FURTHER NORTH ★★★

REPRISE

Top singer-songwriter whose video features Winona Ryder

"We're all stuck out in the desert and we're gonna die": Right from the jump, Scottish-American Johnathan Rice lets you know that he has moved to L.A., where he composed this classic SoCal singer-songwriter album. Sarcastic, not that hopeful (the protest song protests protest songs), full of coyotes, wildfires and wistful looks back at what might have been, this is an impressive set for anyone, let alone a 24-year-old with just one previous release. He duets with his boo, Jenny Lewis, on "The End of the Affair," and he channels the Byrds on "What Am I Gonna Do?" before the chiming chords turn into Pixies-ish prickiness. If there's a drawback to *Further North*, it's Rice's parched delivery, which makes the songs sound more world-weary than the words would suggest. Still, this is a collection Warren Zevon >>

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would have been proud of—and he couldn't sing, either.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "The Middle of the Road," "What Am I Gonna Do," "Further North"

SHOUT OUT LOUDS

OUR ILL WILLS ★★★

MERGE

Optimistic Swedes could make decent money as therapists

If Adam Olenius sang for a less tasteful band, he'd be finished. Gushing shakily through this quintet's second album as if just coming down from a tantrum, he causes an uncomfortable scene wherever he goes: He's the neurotic who breaks out

in tears on the dance floor, who begs a friend to stay up all night, saying, "I don't want to wake up knowing I don't have a future." What reins him in is the elegance and cheer of the Shout Out Louds' arrangements.

Borrowing liberally and transparently from Bright Eyes, the Cure and mid-1960s chamber pop, the band sublimates familiar expressions of indie gloom with string flourishes and twinkling piano lines, giving Olenius both a shoulder to cry on and, in soaring songs like "Tonight I Have to Leave It," a source of joy.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: "Tonight I Have to Leave It," "Your Parents' Living Room"

STARS

IN OUR BEDROOM AFTER THE WAR

★★★½

ARTS & CRAFTS

The Montreal band with the Google-proof name rough up their music and get gassed

Like all young Canadians with interesting hair, Torquil Campbell and Amy Millan, the co-frontpeople of Stars, are occasional members of Broken Social Scene. But until now, very little of that band's explosive expansiveness has trickled down to Campbell and Millan's day job: Early Stars releases were full of precise, polite, often precious electropop. Their fourth album toughens things up immeasurably. "Take Me to the Riot" contrasts Campbell's arch, affected voice with fuzzed-out bass, clattering drums and sordid memories ("Saturday nights and neon light/ ... pills enough to make me feel ill!"), and the breathy Millan's "Bitches in Tokyo" is a zippy and messy delight. Only the soppy "Barricade"—

on which Campbell finds love, tears and teargas while at a protest march—relapses into pretension. Next time: take more pills!

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: "The Night Starts Here," "Take Me to the Riot"

TWISTA

ADRENALINE RUSH 2007 ★★★

ATLANTIC

Chicago motormouth can't get out of the fast lane

Hip-hop's reigning contortionist, Twista, has built a 16-year career cramming syllables where they don't belong, at autobahn speeds. An enduring novelty, he's had his biggest success (and he's at his most palatable) pairing his breakneck flow with that of a slower, more reasonable collaborator: His hurried appearance on Kanye West's down-tempo "Slow Jamz" made for a lively contradiction. On his sixth album, a guest list including R. Kelly, Cee-Lo and Lil Wayne—who yuks it up on the dirty-money standout "Whip

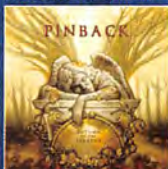
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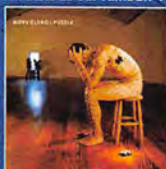


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* Dates subject to change.

Game Proper”—helps to offset Twista’s hyperactivity. When he raps on his own, though, there’s nothing to distract from the fact that he’s less a rapper and more a caffeinated human beat box, manically bouncing sounds against the drum track. He never seems to tire of this breathless show-boating—which makes one of us.

LEAH ROSE

DOWNLOAD: “Whip Game Proper,” “Pimp Like Me”

THE CD WE DIDN'T EVEN UNWRAP



JES COVER ART: DAVIES • STARR

WE ARE STANDARD

3000V-4000W ★★☆☆

MINTY FRESH

Spanish band's Ecstasy flashback

Around 1990, the coast of Spain was the destination for Brits who wanted to get out of their heads on drugs and dance to loud guitars. We Are Standard pick up on the fuzz-box funk they left behind. “We don’t want to take you down/We want you to dance around,” Deu Txcartegi drawls with an audible leer, and this debut never gets deeper than that. Those who lived through the Happy Mondays era may recognize WAS’s constant quotations from old records—“Supermarket” is an eight-minute elaboration on half a verse from “Common People,” Pulp’s 1995 satire of slumming. One drippy ballad aside, the album is well suited for simultaneous headbanging and hands-in-the-air dancing, especially when Txcartegi shuts up and lets the band rip.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: “Love Train,” “Supermarket”

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Sri Lankan-raised singer-rapper-chanter-hopper scrambles genres on CD number two.



SWIZZ BEATZ

ONE MAN BAND MAN

FULL SURFACE/UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

Gone solo, this rap superproducer proves everything is funnier if you add the word *bitches* to it.

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BLENDER [APPROVED]

BEST BUY

'77 PROBLEMS

A brilliant debut built from a poetic dweeb's anguish (By **JON DOLAN**)

ELVIS COSTELLO

MY AIM IS TRUE ★★★★★½

HIP-0/UME

MY AIM IS TRUE opens by promising a whole lot of nothing. On "Welcome to the Working Week," Elvis Costello sits in his room—frazzled, pasty, miserable. He sees a model in the paper and knows she's being "rhythmically admired" all over England. "Sometimes I wonder if we're living in the same land," he spits. Not even close, pal. But the country of messed-up impulses he inhabits is way cooler.

No one had been as conversationally frank about bitterness, disappointment, contempt and frustration as Costello was in 1977 on *My Aim Is True* (here in its third iteration as a reissue). A former computer operator and Catholic-school attendee, Declan McManus took a stage name that combined mythic rocker and comic fool, and crashed the weird space

for mutant stars recently created by the Sex Pistols. (He won notoriety by telling an interviewer he was motivated by only two emotions: revenge and guilt.) But where most punks cranked primal noise, Costello was too proud of his writerly rants to bury them in distortion. Noise would only blur the Raymond Chandler-esque murder mystery "Watching the Detectives," with its cold-eyed disdain for rich people.

The music is folk-rock and R&B sped up to fit hot-tempered times. The chiming guitar on "(The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes" recalls the Byrds, and Costello's snarl is a clinched version of Bob Dylan's on *Highway 61 Revisited*.

He's scariest singing about his wracked self. On the deceptively sweet country-tinged "Alison," Costello suggests he might get physical with his reluctant love object, adding menace to the soft refrain "My aim is true." Plenty of '70s singer-songwriters said nasty things about women, but Costello was unique in exposing his powerlessness. On the blitzing "I'm Not Angry," a would-be girlfriend cheats while he listens in the hallway, trying to pretend he's too detached to care—"There's no such thing as an original sin," he reminds himself. It's the stance of an emotionally stunted deep feeler, and 30 years of indie-rockers owe him a thanks-Dad shoulder punch.

My Aim Is True

is the quintessential promising debut, a great album presaging greater ones. His backing group isn't nearly as fired up as he is (later, several of them would become Huey Lewis's band). Costello knew it, and he soon assembled the Attractions, a tempestuous three-piece still getting to know one another at the time of the August 1977 live show that takes up most of the second disc. Steve Nieve's ballpark organ drowns out the guitar, and though Costello sings with nail-spitting gusto, the music feels a half step slow, making angry songs sound resigned. In the next two years, they recorded two astonishing albums: the blistering media critique *This Year's Model* and the sociopolitical dissection *Armed Forces*. Then Costello led them on a long journey to unimpeachable respectability. Now he's an institution—so it's thrilling to witness him here, before he was perfect.

Download: "Alison," "Less Than Zero," "(The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes"

THE SCORE

- ★★★★★ CLASSIC
- ★★★★ GREAT
- ★★★ GOOD
- ★★ MIEDIOCRE
- ★ FOUL

ANI DIFRANCO

CANON ★★

RIGHTEOUS BABE

Feminist folkie muffles some of the anger that made her an indie icon

Armed with a nose ring and jazzy phrasing, Ani DiFranco assaulted the image of the dainty female troubadour. She was, an early song warned, "Not a Pretty Girl." Neither was the music: The Buffalo, New York-bred anti-folkie traded sweet harmonies and gentle strumming for scat-influenced vocals, percussively fingerpicked guitar and arrangements that remained stark even as she added drums and minimalist accents (like the canny horn riff in "Marrow"). Now, after 18 albums in 17 years—all for her own label—DiFranco pauses for a recap. The two-disc, 36-song *Canon* is solid, yet too extensive for beginners—while offering no new songs to devotees. "Cradle & All" is a headlong ode to "the city that never shuts up," and the chorus to "Untouchable Face" is "fuck you," but she's excluded her most appealingly cranky early rants, including "Not a Pretty Girl."

MARK JENKINS

Download: "Cradle & All," "Marrow"

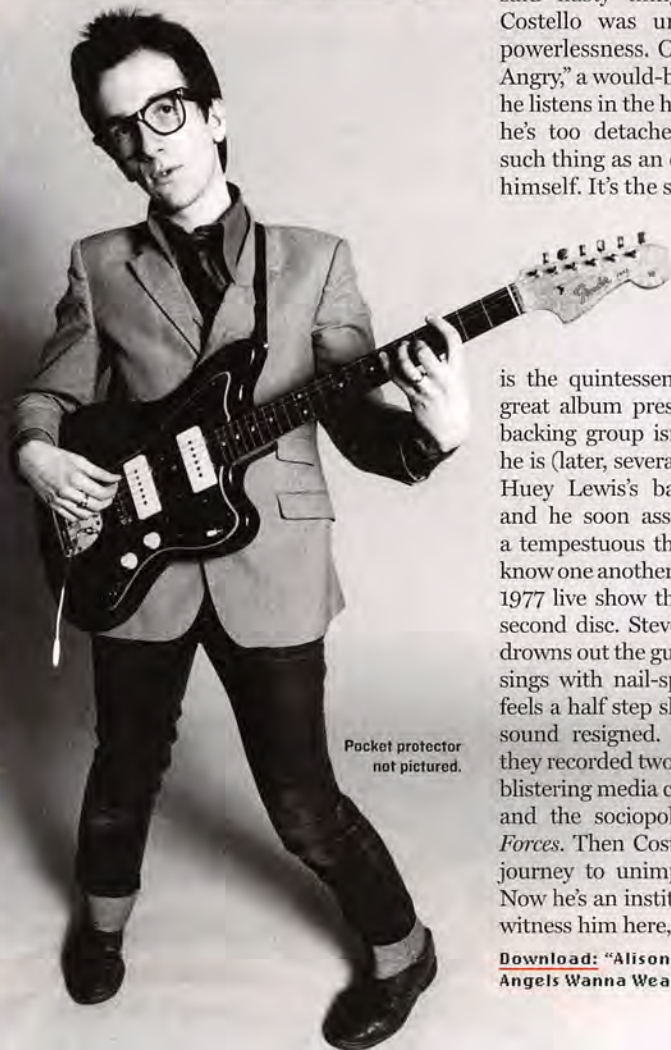
THE FIRE ENGINES

HUNGRY BEAT ★★★★★

ACUTE

Scottish postpunk phantoms get the anthology they deserve

Franz Ferdinand revere the Fire Engines so highly they lured them out of retirement in 2004 to play a surprise gig for Franz fans. Formed in 1980, the Fire Engines blurred the line between disco and discord, coming across like a scrawny Scottish tribute to James Brown (mal)nourished on potato-chip sandwiches, deep-fried Mars bars and other local delicacies. Frontman Davy Henderson didn't have much of a voice, but he gets by on exuberance. His rhythm guitar jostles with Murray Slade's even-more-rhythm guitar, flint-ing sparks like a clash of light sabers. Songcraft wasn't their



Pocket protector not pictured.

forte, so the best tracks on this compilation (their first U.S. release) are near-instrumentals of ambient music for hyperactive people. The friction funk of "Get Up and Use Me" and "Sympathetic Anaesthetic" still provides a thrilling live-wire jolt to the nervous system.

SIMON REYNOLDS

Download: "Get Up and Use Me (Version)," "Candyskin"

EMMYLOU HARRIS

SONGBIRD: RARE TRACKS & FORGOTTEN GEMS ★★★

RHINO

Some of the duets on this rarities box are among Harris's best performances. But \$75 is a steep price to hear them

Emmylou Harris didn't come into country music the old-fashioned way, and if there's an American tradition she belongs to, it's that of self-reinvention. A former high school beauty queen and folksinger, she was discovered by Gram Parsons, a wealthy Harvard dropout pursuing a vision of "cosmic American music" grounded in the close harmonies of old acts like the Louvin Brothers. Swept away by that sound, Harris grew into an unlikely guardian of country's traditions. The first two discs of her second box set contain duets with Parsons, then veer through her bluegrass period and the more arty, filmy music she made with U2 producer Daniel Lanois. *Songbird's* second two discs are devoted to rarities—including duets with Linda Ronstadt, Steve Earle and Beck—that don't stray far from the unflagging modesty that has marked her career. Harris is the best harmony singer in country, but this is a pricey way to prove it.

ROBERT LEVINE

Download: "Ashes by Now" with Dr. John, "Coat of Many Colors"

BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS

EXODUS ★★★

ISLAND

Prime Marley, half hell-raising politico and half smooth lover man

The 30th-anniversary edition of Bob Marley's 1977 record—once honored by *Time* as the best album of the 20th century—is tough to hear through its legend (and through the *Legend* compilation, which has sold 10 million copies and includes five of these 10 songs). At the time, though, it was a report from the front lines by a reggae star with a knack for aphorisms who'd just gone into exile himself, leaving

Jamaica for England after an attempt on his life. The first half is a suite of fiery-sounding political and religious anthems that are largely more universal than specific; the second half's superior love songs move smoothly from seduction to longing to the party hymn "One Love/People Get Ready." The whole thing is graced with painstakingly weightless arrangements—the I-Threes' backing vocals are ravishing—as well as some of Marley's most durable epigrams.

DOUGLAS WOLK

Download: "Three Little Birds," "Exodus"

MATCHBOX TWENTY

EXILE ON MAINSTREAM ★★★

MELISMA/ATLANTIC

Florida's contribution to modern rock

Since 1996—for better and mostly worse—Matchbox Twenty have been the sound of mainstream rock. "3 A.M." and "Unwell" were huge hits, disguising Rob Thomas's anxiety—his life is always either in ruins or about to be ruined—within traditionalist songs that foreground the humongous voice of a singer perennially on the verge of chomping into his microphone like it's a New York sirloin. *Exile on Mainstream* (the title is a self-effacing joke about their lack of edginess) augments 11 oldies with six new tracks, which move ably between jittery power pop, country, even a little blue-eyed soul. As always, the subject matter is grim, but the sound is sleekly contoured, the key to their 40 million record sales. Unlike other bands that emerged after grunge, Matchbox Twenty know that angst and



Ringo would do nearly anything to hide from Yoko Ono.

self-pity go down better when served (as a certain large-lunged lunk once sang) smooth.

JODY ROSEN

Download: "3 A.M."

RINGO STARR

PHOTOGRAPH: THE VERY BEST OF ...

★★★

CAPITOL

Drumming was his madness. Then brandy. Singing never really contended

"I was in the greatest show on earth/For what it was worth ..." This lyric, written for Ringo by John Lennon on the 1973 track "I'm the Greatest," encapsulates Starr's solo career: initially jet-propelled ("Photograph" and "You're Sixteen" were No. 1s) yet racked with ambivalence about fame, history and his own *raison d'être*. The vaguely nostalgic "Photograph" sets the tone: superficially bouncy pop undercut by Starr's naive, melancholy warble, perpetuating the cuddly image introduced in *A Hard Day's Night*. It's an image he rarely both-

ered to challenge (for most of the '70s and '80s, he was too drunk), yet his best work—the stomping "Back Off Boogaloo," the moving George Harrison tribute "Never Without You"—is ebullient and dedicated, a firm reminder that lovability is a talent, too.

TONY POWER

Download: "Back Off Boogaloo," "It Don't Come Easy"

YOUNG MARBLE GIANTS

COLOSSAL YOUTH ★★★½

DOMINO

A great punk record you can't jump around your room to

Of all the "postpunk" bands to pop up in the wake of the Sex Pistols, these Welsh worrywarts were the least punk and the most post. The spare atmospherics on their lone 1980 album (expanded here to three discs with singles, demos and a BBC radio appearance) went so far beyond the era's clattering shoutfests that they seem beamed in from a distant ice planet—one without drummers, distorted guitars or romance. Stuart Moxham's spry, skeletal guitar jags and woozy abstract organ, girded by his brother Phil's brusque bass pokes, left endless room for singer Alison Statton's ghostly evocations of odd-woman-out detachment. Each song is like a little igloo, providing tenuous shelter against a harsh world. Even the resigned meditation on nuclear war ("Final Day") feels like a safe place.

JON DOLAN

Download: "Searching for Mr Right," "Final Day," "Credit in the Straight World"

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FOO FIGHTERS

THE COLOUR AND THE SHAPE
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In which Dave Grohl gets over his old buddy, his old band and his old wife—by whipping up a glorious grunge-pop racket.



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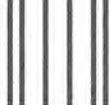
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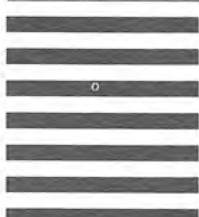
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Don't Wait



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GENESIS

GEEZERS ON TOUR NOW!

Stage one: 20-minute epics and lyrics about dragons. Stage two: Divorce ballads and Phil Collins. The two lives of these absurd, hairy Brits

(By JON PARELES)

EVERY ORIGINAL ALBUM REVIEWED

HATE PRETENSION? BETTER turn the page now. Pretension defines Genesis in all its phases, from the progressive-rock band with epic ambitions led by Peter Gabriel to the earnest, ominous pop group that emerged after drummer Phil Collins took over as lead singer in 1975. Even die-hard

Genesis fans agree that some of the band's catalogue is finger-exercise twaddle. The disagreement is over how much.

At first, Genesis were precocious English prep-school pals smitten with classical richness, virtuoso complexities and lyrics invoking fables and sci-fi. But as Gabriel, keyboardist Tony Banks and bassist Mike Rutherford changed bandmates, the songs grew more overstuffed as well as faster, smarter and stranger, until they were irresistibly outlandish. Then Gabriel left.

Amazingly, Genesis already included another member who sang like a grizzled old man: Collins. As he gradually revealed a fondness for R&B and forlorn first-person love songs, he turned Genesis from a cult band into Top 40 hitmakers. But Collins got his R&B jollies more easily on solo albums, and he left in 1996.

Like the flower-petal getup Peter Gabriel often wore around his head onstage, some Genesis albums haven't aged well. Yet now that indie-rockers are embracing odd time signatures, or expanding song structures toward suites and orchestral lushness, this year's reunited Genesis—the Collins version—might not seem quite so dorkaphonic. Still, Genesis was always more prog than rock. Its songs are mostly marches, anthems or shimmering pastorals—lots of intricacy, little crunch. Anyone harboring a fondness for grandeur need look no further to get their pomp on.

Genesis, 1975 (from left): Phil Collins, Tony Banks, Peter Gabriel, Steve Hackett and Mike Rutherford.



ESSENTIAL

SELLING ENGLAND BY THE POUND

CHARISMA/ATLANTIC, 1973

★★★★★



Their fifth record is prog Genesis at its pinnacle, an album of song-suites that can barely stop morphing long

enough to show off a majestic tune or a spiraling guitar riff. It's a concept album (but of course) about Britain's long descent from past glories: from Shakespeare and chivalry to dead-end jobs and supermarket shopping. Midway through, "More Fool Me" introduces Collins as the morosely romantic lead singer he would later become full-time. But most of the album flaunts songs that are stuffed with stop-start riffs, shifty meters, atmospheric interludes and nutty rhymes: meticulously plotted excess.

DOWNLOAD: "Dancing With the Moonlit Knight," "Firth of Fifth," "The Cinema Show"

INVISIBLE TOUCH

ATLANTIC, 1986

★★★★★



Here's pop Genesis at its overachieving best, trying to pack musicianly thrills into simpler structures.

Collins is in full lonely-guy mode, bemoaning unapproachable women or conjuring suspenseful plots—even doing both at once in "In Too Deep" and the big but snappy suite "Domino." Banks's recital-hall piano and organ had long since given way to foreboding synthesizer chords and brittle notes that ricochet all over the place, syncopating neatly against Collins's salvos of tom-toms. The songs unfold in a percussive, artificial realm that makes Collins's voice sound even more isolated in his yearning and his predicaments. At 6 million copies, it's their U.S. blockbuster.

DOWNLOAD: "Invisible Touch," "Tonight, Tonight, Tonight," "The Brazilian"

GREAT

A TRICK OF THE TAIL

ATCO/ATLANTIC, 1976

★★★★★



Denial can be a beautiful thing. After Gabriel left Genesis for a solo career melding new wave and world music, the band tried to

maintain its old self. Collins openly imitated Gabriel, and when Banks and Rutherford stepped forward as the main songwriters, they kept up the oblique storytelling lyrics and the multipart structures, cinched by the filigree and sinew of Steve Hackett's guitar. The songs are still fantasias, but they don't ramble.

DOWNLOAD: "Dance on a Volcano," "Entangled"

DUKE

ATLANTIC, 1980

★★★★★



A schizoid but invigorating album. Part of it goes for Gabriel-style Genesis, with fanfare-like keyboards, martial drumrolls

and the old opulence. But one song, "Guide Vocal," has lyrics that give Gabriel a definitive kiss-off—and another is about Collins's divorce. The music usually stays upbeat (two tracks became FM-radio staples), and every so often, the hazy instrumental passages clear up for the kind of straightforward songs that would define latter-day Genesis.

DOWNLOAD: "Turn It On Again," "Misunderstanding"

GENESIS

ATLANTIC, 1983

★★★★★



The drums go boom and Collins belts hard while simple keyboard hooks are slammed home on this determined attempt

to go pop with Police and XTC producer Hugh Padgham. (Are those cookie cutters on the album cover?) It worked; the songs are so concise they're virtually new wave, but still steeped in angst. Only the surprisingly stupid, Mexican-accented "Illegal Alien"—where craftsmanship overcomes good sense—tarnishes the album.

DOWNLOAD: "That's All," "Just a Job to Do"

CHECK IT OUT

NURSERY CRYME

ATCO/ATLANTIC, 1971

☆☆☆



Two new musicians—Collins on drums and Hackett on guitar—put some kick into the band. They were full of ideas, testing extremes of

fingerpicking delicacy and rock riffing, expansiveness and compression. Compared to what Genesis would become, their third album can sound clumsy. But for once in their career, decorum didn't always matter.

DOWNLOAD: "The Fountain of Salamis," "Harold the Barrel"

THE LAMB LIES DOWN ON BROADWAY

ATCO/ATLANTIC, 1974

☆☆☆



Sooner or later, every progressive-rock band has to do its double-LP concept/opera/extravaganza, and for Gabriel's Genesis, it was

The Lamb. The plotline, a surreal odyssey, tracks a character named Rael Imperial Aerosol Kid through a phantasmagoria of urban squalor and subterranean ghoulies. The title song ranks with Genesis's most majestic moments, and there are some nicely creepy set pieces. But the filler stretches on and on.

DOWNLOAD: "The Carpet Crawlers," "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway"

... AND THEN THERE WERE THREE ...

ATLANTIC, 1978

☆☆☆



Adios to Steve Hackett's lead guitar. Pared down to Collins, Banks and Rutherford, Genesis made its most anthem-laden

album, with keyboardist Banks seizing the foreground. The songs are still high-concept scenarios—one seems to be about a killer snowman—but the music sets aside most of the old digressions in favor of pop discipline. For all their grandiose reverberations, the songs stay grounded in melody. With "Follow You Follow Me," Genesis had its first U.S. hit, even if old fans started to feel betrayed.

DOWNLOAD: "Burning Rope," "Undertow"

BE CAREFUL

TRESPASS

CHARISMA/MCA, 1970

☆☆



As serious as all get-out, this first effort at large-scale songwriting was a warm-up. The lyrics grapple with good and evil, salvation and

vengeance. But the band's classical-folk-jazz meld hasn't yet moved from hyphenation to hybrid.

DOWNLOAD: "The Knife"

FOXTROT

CHARISMA/ATLANTIC, 1972

☆☆☆



Warning: Mello-tron in use. The bombast runs thick on this album, nearly half of which is devoted to the music-hall

apocalypse of the 23-minute suite "Supper's Ready." *Foxtrot* was Genesis's milestone at the time, yet what sounded wildly innovative 35 years ago now seems endearingly goofy and all too overblown.

DOWNLOAD: "Supper's Ready"

WIND & WUTHERING

ATCO/ATLANTIC, 1976

☆☆



After *A Trick of the Tail*, this second 1976 album seemed flabby. Still seeking the grandeur of the Gabriel years, the band

went mostly for the slow and momentous, complete with filibustering interludes that anesthetize the songs.

DOWNLOAD: "... In That Quiet Earth"

ABACAB

ATLANTIC, 1981

☆☆☆



Straining to feel like virtuosos while staying terse, Genesis piled up staccato, minimalist keyboard patterns behind some of

their bleakest lyrics. The ambition is palpable, but too many songs just misfire. The one that doesn't, "No Reply at All," echoes the funk and horns (from R&B masters Earth, Wind & Fire) Collins was savoring on his smash solo debut, *Face Value*.

DOWNLOAD: "No Reply at All"

FOR FANS ONLY

FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

EDSEL, 1969

☆



Every band has to start somewhere. Genesis arrived, produced by English pop impresario Jonathan King, as an earnest, mushy,

cliché-spouting knockoff of the Moody Blues. "Fill your mind with love," Gabriel sings, soon to have strings and horns gooped on top of the band. The most amazing thing about this album—a true relic of late-1960s hokum—is that Genesis didn't change the band name out of embarrassment.

DOWNLOAD: "Where the Sour Turns to Sweet"

WE CAN'T DANCE

ATLANTIC, 1991

☆☆



"We're all played out," Collins sings on his last album with Genesis. It's not awful, exactly. But coming after a five-year break and the huge

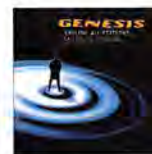
success of *Invisible Touch*, it's just another set of crisply proficient, bummed-out pop songs—with the 10-minute suite about English railway workers, "Driving the Last Spike," slipped in. That's a rare sign of initiative on an album that clearly boils down to singles-plus-filler. The songs are neatly made, but even the better ones come across like reruns.

DOWNLOAD: "I Can't Dance"

... CALLING ALL STATIONS ...

ATLANTIC, 1997

☆



Trademark turns into travesty. With Collins gone, Banks and Rutherford signed on a chesty new singer, Ray Wilson, picked

up a studio drummer and remade Genesis as a muscle-headed bar-band imitation of its cheesiest self. The title song wonders: "Can anybody tell me, tell me exactly where I am/I've lost all sense of direction." Ain't it the truth ... And they haven't released an album since.

DOWNLOAD: None

FURTHER LISTENING

PLATINUM COLLECTION

ATLANTIC, 2004

☆☆☆☆

Even their compilations sprawl. These three CDs were sensibly chosen from the full span of their career, including a good EP cut, "Paperlate." Oddly, it runs backward from 1991 to 1970, but tucks an embarrassing 1997 track at the end of CD 1. If it were generous, it could have included "The Carpet Crawlers 1999," a remake with Collins and Gabriel sharing vocals. That track is reserved for *Turn It On Again: The Hits*, which concentrates on Collins-era Genesis.

DOWNLOAD: "Paperlate," "In Too Deep"

GENESIS LIVE

ATLANTIC, 1973

☆☆

Since Genesis barely alter their complex songs in concert, their several live albums are largely redundant: same arrangements, more audience noise. This first one, from the Gabriel years, cherry-picks the best early epics, but it could use more photos of Gabriel's cringe-inducing costumes.

DOWNLOAD: "Musical Box"

GENESIS LIVE/ THE WAY WE WALK, VOLUME ONE: THE SHORTS ☆☆☆
VOLUME TWO: THE LONGS ☆☆☆

ATLANTIC, 1992, ATLANTIC, 1993

These two live albums separate the radio hits (*Vol. 1*) from the suites (*Vol. 2*). *Vol. 1* is lean and vehement, holding on to the bitterness in the songs. *Vol. 2* is more rote, though "Old Medley"—combining bits of the ancient suites—tacitly admits those songs weren't so unified after all.

DOWNLOAD: "Invisible Touch," "Domino"

Interpol,
brought to you
by the Bug
Zapper 5000.



THE CHILL FACTOR

Shock: Gloomy New Yorkers throw a hell of a dance party

INTERPOL

THE FILLMORE, DETROIT

JULY 28, 2007 1/2

CYBORGS AREN'T SUPPOSED to make mistakes. "Pioneer to the Falls," tonight's opening song (and the lead track off Interpol's new album, *Our Love to Admire*), starts with a shiver-inducing guitar figure, and Daniel Kessler flubs one of the notes.

It's an uncharacteristic error for a band whose perfectionist sound centers on a forbidding, architectural sense of order. Shrouded in darkness, their fitted formal-wear glimpsed only in the stage's roving searchlights, Interpol suddenly seem less like a gaggle of chic vampires than regular, if somberly attired, humans.

And right now these humans have entered a crucial moment in their burgeoning career: Their first two albums, released on an indie label, sold about half a million copies each and established Interpol as the leading incarnation of black-clad urban cool.

Our Love to Admire, their first disc for a major label, means to parlay that anti-charisma into superstar sales. And it got

off to an encouraging start: first-week sales of nearly 75,000. But as they face a diverse crowd who've come to see them in the pasty flesh, these unsmiling New Yorkers risk seeming a bit like, well, dicks.

Interpol aren't the types to crack a self-deprecating joke after a screw-up—that would yank them out from behind the scrim of melodrama. The mystery lets fans project their own expectations onto the music, whether they're standing rapt, as if awaiting condolences for a moribund

love life, or dancing, arms aloft, with fellow sorority sisters.

The band sure doesn't pander to the audience. Four well-received songs pass in all their bleak grandeur before frontman Paul Banks utters so much as a "thank you very much," and at his most animated, he rubs the crown of his head, slowly, as if a rogue coconut just stunned him. The flashiest thing he does all night is strap on a Flying V guitar (finished in black).

Carlos D., whose facial hair resembles

INTERPOL PARKING LOT



ALLIE CARTER
19, STUDENT
CHICAGO

"They seem like the type of guys who'd just walk around the city at three in the morning, looking for something to do."



CLINTON SPRINGER
30, AUDIO-VISUAL
TECHNICIAN
CHICAGO

"They're very calm onstage—they don't jump around. But they enhance the show with their suits."



NICOLE DAVIDSON
32, CAFETERIA WORKER
TOLEDO, OHIO

"I got into them because they sound like Joy Division. They don't seem totally rock & roll. From what I hear, they're kind of artsy."

Carlos D. awaits the return of his trusty stallion.



a train robber's, stoops over his low-slung bass and stares downward, seemingly in search of a lost cuff link. Drummer Sam Fogarino isn't just buttoned up—he wears a tie clip. Only Kessler seems to relish the stage, stepping to the edge and screwing up his face in concentration.

Properly presenting these songs requires focus: They're crafted not only as impregnable monuments to brooding, but also as propulsive, pop-savvy dorm fodder. It's a neat trick, and if the songs sound a little too alike, blame the richness of the formula: deliciously gloomy guitar riding a disco-wise wave of rhythm.

Supplemented with a minimalist LED light show, the set draws equally from three albums, and while the new tracks do justice to the ornate old theater—the suits of armor flanking the stage would make a fine tour prop—they sport less joie de vivre than early songs like "Say Hello to the Angels" and "Obstacle 1."

Banks writes fragmentary musings on romantic ennui, and at times, his confessional hush comes close to a mumble. He's like an overgrown teen, muttering under his breath and hiding behind a fringe of hair. (High school poetry like "You lack the things/To which I relate" doesn't help.) And though the music sounds withdrawn, even Vulcan in its avoidance of emotion, the effect is surprisingly warm and cathartic: It sets off columns of dancing throughout the Fillmore, in everyone except the four band members. *Nick Catucci*

QUEER AS FOLK

The mighty Quins find the laughs in girl-on-girl heartache songs

TEGAN AND SARA

SOUTHPAW, BROOKLYN, NY

AUGUST 2, 2007 **★★★★**

SARA QUIN, THE higher-voiced, goofier identical twin, is in the middle of a rambling story—this one about having "900 boyfriends" in the second grade, but also about rollerblading, as well as going to see the cheesy musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*—when she stops to ask her sister a question. "Oh, I'm sorry," Tegan says without looking up. "Were you talking?" The audience roars. Sara shrugs and, before launching into the next tune, announces, "The point is, Tegan's a cunt!"

The mulleted, supercute lesbians have been perfecting their comical act—unpredictable anecdotes, playful banter, foul-mouthed faux sibling rivalry—for years. So when Sara reprimands some chattering patrons ("If you can't shut up for one song, then you're a jerk!"), everyone knows it's a punch line. But with *The Con*, their bighearted fourth album, Canada's Tegan and Sara are lurking just outside the mainstream, and with good reason. Coproduced by Death Cab for Cutie's Christopher Walla, it's one of the year's best pop records, bursting with sweetly off-kilter melodies and a unique she-said/she-said

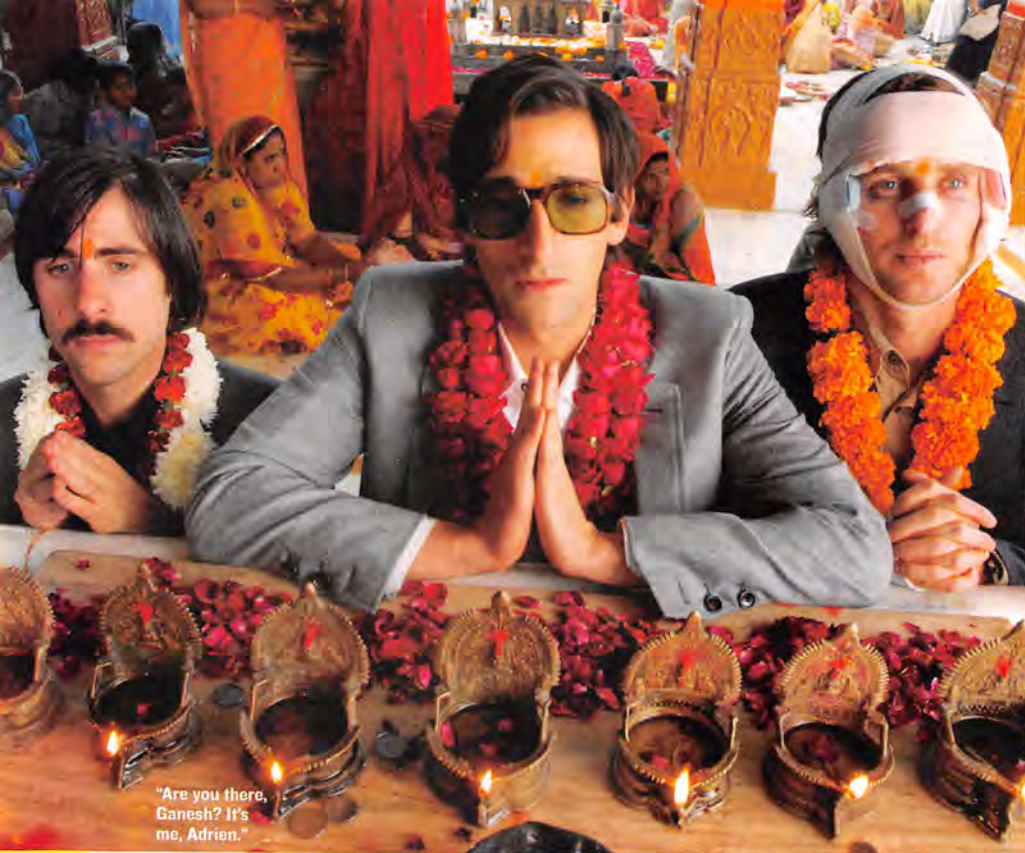
take on romance. Tonight's Brooklyn club is smaller than the theaters they've graduated to, but it's a perfect testing ground for their new material, since the audience is evenly split between the twin pillars of the twins' booming fan base: One half is tattooed-and-pierced women with their arms around girlfriends; the other half is skinny, T-shirted indie-rock boys with their arms around *their* girlfriends.

While Tegan's songs tend to be more directly emotional, like the pogo-ing punk of "Hop a Plane" and the lilting, acoustic heartbreak of "Soil, Soil," Sara's have the same loopy, unpredictable cadence as her digressive stories: New single "Back in Your Head"—with a guest appearance by AFI's bald bassist Hunter Bergan, who takes the stage just to shake a tambourine—bounces along to its own irresistible rhythm, and an encore of her spooky new-wave valentine "Walking With a Ghost" gets the second biggest ovation of the night. The loudest is saved for set-closer "Living Room," a springy favorite from the sister's folksier days that has couples dancing and sweating in whatever pockets of empty space they can find. When the lights come on, a derisive jeer bubbles up from the crowd. They may not want to see the twins get along peacefully, but they also don't want to see them leave.

ANDY GREENWALD

Tegan: "Sara, are you checking out your own ass?"





"Are you there, Ganesh? It's me, Adrien."



Control: Someone might want to consider a new antiperspirant.



Into the Wild: "See this movie or the dog gets it."

CRAZY TRAIN

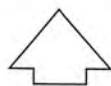
Wes Anderson's quirky passage through India (By DAVID FEAR)

NO ONE MAKES movies like Wes Anderson. Even if you miss the opening credits of **THE DARJEELING LIMITED** (★★★★), you'd immediately know that the same filmmaker who made 1999's insta-classic *Rushmore* was behind the camera. Regardless of where Anderson's movies are set, they all really take place in Wes World, a micromanaged landscape of visual bric-a-brac and indie quirk. Dig those retro '70s zooms, those symmetrical wide-angle compositions, the vintage-Kinks tunes on the soundtrack. When Anderson's obsessive aesthetic doesn't jibe with the performances, or when his scripts are jittery, the result comes off like twee self-parody (see 2004's *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou*). But when everything falls into place, as it does for much of *The Darjeeling Limited*, his movies give way to something far deeper than film geekery.

The *Darjeeling Limited* is the train that will take three brothers—jet-setter Jack (Jason Schwartzman), father-to-be Peter (Adrien Brody) and can-do control freak Francis (Owen Wilson)—through the Indian countryside in search of spiritual enlightenment. The siblings have been estranged and emotionally adrift since their father died the previous year, so what better way to re-bond than by taking a long trip? Naturally, nothing goes as planned, tempers flare and peo-

ple get pepper-sprayed. An unexpected tragedy along the way, however, ends up bringing the trio closer together.

As in Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), the emphasis on family ties grounds the movie's deadpan dialogue and obscure pop-culture references. And even those who don't care for



THE EXCITED-O-METER

We haven't seen 'em yet ... and we're not even sure we want to



VERY EXCITED

THE HEARTBREAK KID

BEN STILLER and the **FARRELLY BROTHERS** reunite for another sad-sack romantic comedy.

EXCITED-ISH

DAN IN REAL LIFE

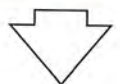
STEVE CARELL is an advice columnist who falls for **JULIETTE BINOCHE**. Just so long as he doesn't build any more arks ...



NOT SO MUCH

GOOD LUCK CHUCK

Not even the promise of seeing **JESSICA ALBA** in her underwear can get us to sit through another **DANE COOK** comedy.



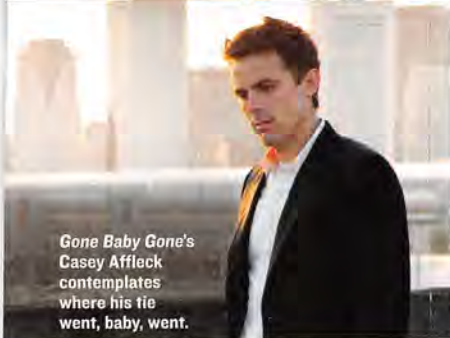
Anderson's self-conscious style ought to be moved by the heartfelt way the film deals with grief and brotherly love.

Anyone who's ever seen live footage of late-'70s/early-'80s Brits Joy Division can testify to the hypnotic power of their late singer, Ian Curtis: Spastically dancing and swaying while intoning gloomy tunes, the lanky frontman was charismatic even when he looked as if he was a million miles away. Anton Corbijn's **CONTROL** (★★★★½) follows the trajectory of Curtis (played by look-alike Sam Riley) from Bowie-obsessed youth to musical icon to suicide casualty. Corbijn, who shot stills of the band for British weekly *NME*, treats the singer as part inscrutable Christ figure and part chronically depressed victim. The director's use of black-and-white film is the perfect way to visualize the group's stark, moody sound. The film, however, is still beholden to the laws of its genre, which means that the future poster boy for nihilism will at one point say that someday the whole world will know his name. You expect poetry, given Corbijn's talent. Instead, *Control* ends up being just another portrait of a self-destructive genius, albeit one as compelling and cryptic as Curtis himself.

Unlike Corbijn's paean to the Joy Division frontman, Sean Penn's **INTO THE WILD** (★★★★½) is never sure whether its protagonist—real-life nature aficionado Christopher McCandless—is an anti-authoritarian hero or just a holy fool. Either way, the actor-director clearly admires McCandless (played by Emile Hirsch) for the lad's commitment: After



Michael Clayton
George Clooney lobbies *People's Sexiest Man Alive* editor.



Gone Baby Gone's
Casey Affleck contemplates where his tie went, baby, went.

BLENDER APPROVED

Missed them in the theater? Catch them on DVD.



28 WEEKS LATER

Rage-infected zombies terrorize London again in this frightening sequel.



THE TV SET

Television's dirty little secret revealed: It's dumbed down!

MUSIC DVDS

Johnny Cash (right) and Waylon Jennings have a good laugh over that man in Reno.



HERE'S JOHNNY!

The Man in Black's small-screen gems (*By* RYAN DOMBAL)

THE BEST OF THE JOHNNY CASH SHOW

(COLUMBIA/LEGACY)

★★★★

With his homespun wisdom and creased, middle-age visage, Johnny Cash came across as a kindly—but very cool—dad on his network music show, which ran from 1969 to 1971. This two-disc set features a whopping 65 performances from the program interspersed with present-day interviews with those who were there. (Affable hairstylist Penny Lane tells a priceless story about June Carter Cash forcing party-less guest Linda Ronstadt to put on a pair of “bloomers” before singing a duet with her husband.) The DVD showcases Cash's exquisite taste: Along with hosting legends like Ray Charles and Carl Perkins, the Man in Black performs arresting duets with Roy Orbison and Bob Dylan.

THE BEST OF THE REST

E-40
YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW: THE VIDEOS

(SHOUT! FACTORY) ★★★★★

Given Jack Clement's reputation as a wildly unpredictable producer-songwriter-filmmaker, it's apt that this documentary about him is more than a little odd. It includes intimate home videos (including one featuring Johnny Cash wearing a pig nose and plastic crown) and an absurd exchange between Clement and a cartoon William Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE WAS A BIG GEORGE JONES FAN

(SHOUT! FACTORY) ★★★★★

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DAVID BOWIE
GLASS SPIDER

(VIRGIN/EMI) ★★★★★

Bowie's 1987 *Glass Spider* tour, with its horrendous costuming and high school theater feel, epitomized the most garish aspects of the '80s. Today, the show's convoluted sci-fi plotline and smoothed-over versions of classics like “Rebel Rebel” are as embarrassing as ever. But still, there's delight to be had in seeing one of the coolest rock legends of all time looking so damn uncool.



LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

BUSTA RHYMES

“*Transformers* was the best movie of the summer. I want Michael Bay to direct my next video. Maybe he could convince one of the Autobots to do a cameo in it.”

MICHAEL CLAYTON: ANJELI HONOWITZ; GONE BABY GONE: CLAIRE FOLGER/MPAA FILMS; 28 WEEKS LATER: 20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT; THE TV SET: FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT; THE BEST OF THE JOHNNY CASH SHOW: LES LEVERETT; BUSTA RHYMES: JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE



The new
Ginsu knife
ads kick ass.

GODDESS OF WAR

This babe-with-blades game is derivative, yet stunning (By LIBE GOAD)

HEAVENLY SWORD

SCEA: PS3

★★★★

SEXY
WORDPLAY!

ONE LOOK AT *Heavenly Sword's* main character—Nariko, a scantily clad female ninja who wields two giant swords—and it becomes glaringly obvious

why this game has generated so much pre-release buzz. Now, after more than a year of hype, the game is finally here, and it has beautiful graphics and tons of action-packed combat. Still, as hot as its heroine is, we can't shake the feeling that she's actually another video-game character in drag—specifically, Kratos, the demigod who stars in the hugely popular *God of War* games for the PS2.

Both Nariko and Kratos are revenge-hungry warriors who brandish a set of twin blades that can be whipped around

on chains. And like *God of War*, *Heavenly Sword* provides players with only the slightest control of the camera, which can result in the awkwardness of engaging in fights with enemies the player can't see. The titles' ancient-Greek and feudal-Japanese settings look quite different, but the general feel of the games—fight through waves of disposable enemies to get to the next section—is remarkably similar.

To its credit, *Heavenly Sword* steals from the best. The pacing is excellent, with major battles interspersed with some simple puzzles (which usually involve finding a switch to open a locked door). The script is typical sword-and-sorcery gibberish, but the top-notch cast of voice actors (including Andy Serkis, Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* movies) gives enthusiastic performances, at least on par with a made-for-cable sci-fi flick—a true rarity, even with today's multi-million-dollar game budgets.

GIZMO OF THE MONTH

SONY PLAYSTATION PORTABLE PSP-2000

The handheld console shrinks to Mary-Kate Olsen proportions

Taking a cue from the Nintendo DS's compact form, Sony has given the PlayStation Portable a tummy tuck, creating a new model unofficially dubbed the PSP Slim (\$169). At first glance, the system seems indistinguishable from the original, but in fact the PSP-2000 is 19 percent thinner and 33 percent lighter than before. Other new features include a video output for playing media files and PSP games on any TV, and some new colors (ceramic white and ice silver). And—nerds, rejoice!—there's a *Star Wars* limited-edition model with a picture of Darth Vader on the back.



JAM SESSIONS

UBISOFT: NINTENDO DS

★★½

Somewhere between wielding an actual guitar and a plastic *Guitar Hero* ax lies *Jam Sessions*, a virtual-guitar simulator for the Nintendo DS that lets you play along with tunes by the likes of Coldplay and Amy Winehouse. Pick a chord by holding down a button, then strum your fingers or stylus across the guitar string pictured on the touch-sensitive screen. It's an intriguing idea, but unlike the hopelessly addictive *Guitar Hero*, the game's novelty wears off quickly.

SKATE

EA: XBOX 360, PS3

★★½

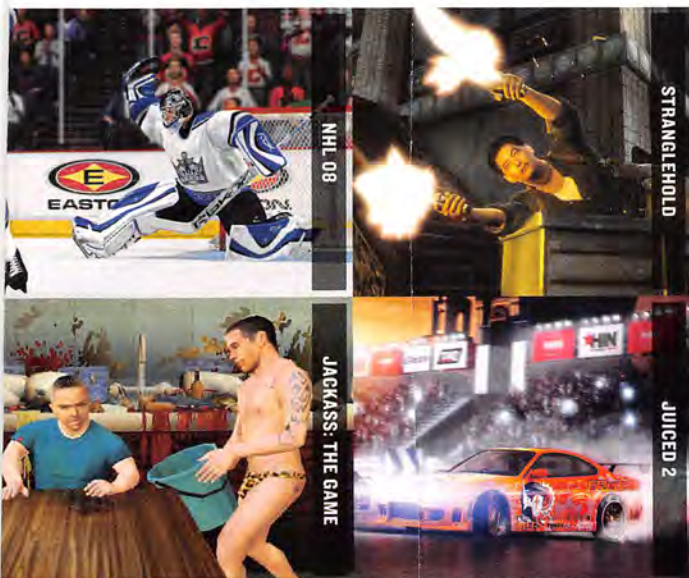
With *Skate's* realistic control scheme and a huge, open-ended city, EA nails the toughest trick of all: putting out a solid skating game without superstar corporate pitchman Tony Hawk. Doing tricks by nudging the controller's two analog sticks in different directions makes hitting those gnarly moves almost as frustrating, and rewarding, as doing them in real life.

NHL 08

EA SPORTS: XBOX 360, PS3

★★½

The latest NHL game from EA requires a surprising amount of skill and finesse. Assigning a player's skates to the left stick on the game controller and his hockey stick to the right side creates one of the most natural-feeling sports games ever, although the requisite fighting sequences are simplistic brawls.



Sean Kingston kept his day job at the Jamaican Tourist Bureau.

JACKASS: THE GAME

RED MILE ENTERTAINMENT, PS2, PSP

☆☆½

The short-attention-span antics of Johnny Knoxville and Company are perfectly suited to this collection of death-defying mini-games. The challenges, which include racing around in a golf cart and rolling down San Francisco's famous hills in a garbage can, never take more than a few minutes each to master. Unfortunately, these minis lack the elements of danger and surprise that made *Jackass* such a monster hit.

JOHN WOO PRESENTS STRANGLEHOLD

MIDWAY, XBOX 360, PS3, PC

☆☆☆

The early-'90s Hong Kong cult-classic film *Hard Boiled* gets a video-game sequel, reuniting director John Woo (as the game's producer) and star Chow

Yun-Fat (who lends his voice and likeness) for more explosive, high-wire action. We love dual-pistol firefights as much as the next guy, but it would be nice if this one-note game had even the original flick's thin plot and character development.

JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

THQ, XBOX 360, PS3

☆☆½

Juiced 2 allows for some of the most detailed car customization ever experienced in a video game. While extreme paint jobs and 20-inch rims are fun, diving into an X-ray view of your car's components is probably for gearheads only. The actual racing part (both online and single-player) is nothing new, but fortunately half the events are of the more exciting drift-racing variety, in which tricked-out rides slide around hairpin turns at godly speeds.

GEEK FILES

SEAN KINGSTON

This month, the 17-year-old "Beautiful Girls" singer proudly lets his dweeb flag fly

Last good game played

Madden 07. I like the graphics, man. I usually play my hype man or my friends, and I usually win.

Favorite classic game

Mario Kart for Nintendo 64. I like that you can shoot other carts and you can go to Alaska. Back in the day, when I was 13, I played it a lot.

Tour-bus staple

NBA Live. It's my favorite game. It's also a good game to bet on. I won \$150 from my hype man once.

My gaming childhood

When I was 13, I almost beat *Donkey Kong* for Nintendo 64—I was one stage away from winning. I thought I saved the game on my memory card, but I lost everything. I was mad. I never tried to beat the whole game again.

A Sean Kingston game would look like

It would be a cool island game. It would be me in Jamaica. You'd go to the beach and to the studio. Also, there'd be me playing streetball against other people. My enemies would be people who didn't believe in me growing up, like ex-friends. And it would be cool to have Rihanna there—she would be my girlfriend.

Geek rating, on a scale of 1 to 10

Six, because I don't have a lot of different games. But now I'll be on the road a lot and will need more to play on the tour bus. *Mark Yarm*

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST GAMES FROM THE PAST MONTHS



THE DARKNESS

2K GAMES, XBOX 360, PS3

A possessed hit man seeks revenge using guns—and his massive man-eating tentacles!



OVERLORD

DOEMASTERS, XBOX 360, PC

What could be better than an army of gremlins who do your evil bidding?

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He may front the fun-lovin' Black Eyed Peas, but in his free time this L.A. native stares down evil cows, narrowly avoids drowning and dreams of a robotic arm. Don't phunk with our heart, man, just tell us ...

By TIM GRIERSON * Photograph by JEFF MINTON

WHO DOES WILL.I.AM THINK HE IS?

You threw away your first self-portrait and drew a new one. Why?

I like this one—it captures my eyes. I've got big-ass fish eyes.

And you gave yourself a big forehead.

I have a big-ass head too.

Is that because you're so creative?

Naw, I just got a big head. My brain's a little pregnant. I think about weird things.

Like what?

Why are we the only species that drinks milk from other animals? About seven years ago I was chilling and I saw a cow. It looked at me in a weird way. I stopped eating beef after that. Just the way the motherfucker looked at me. A chicken wouldn't look at you that way.

Did you have a nickname as a kid?

I grew up in the projects in L.A., and I was always thinking or doing something out of the ordinary. And they'd say, "Fucking Willie."

What's the worst mistake you've ever made?

Jumping in a pool when I was 10. A lifeguard pulled me out and gave me CPR. [Smiles.] Mouth-to-mouth.

Was that your first kiss?

It was my first *wet* one. But I don't remember it—I was unconscious. They wrote down the time that I passed away. But then I came back!

If we drug-tested you right now, what would we find?

Sugar. Nothing else—not even aspirin. I don't like medicine. And I only go to doctors for big problems. Like, I've had this ringing in my ear for five months straight. It doesn't stop! But if I listen to loud music, it's cool.

Do you have any vices?

Phones: I've got an iPhone, a BlackBerry, a Curve, the other BlackBerry, a Treo, a Prada phone, a Sidekick, two laptops. I'm gonna hook up with a manufacturer in Hong Kong and create my own brand of phone.

How much is a quart of milk?

Two bucks, sixty-nine cents? [Shrugs.] I'm lactose-intolerant.

Any tattoos or piercings?

Not on me. If I had a kid, I'd get my kid's face tattooed—naw! I'd get my kid's *footprints* on me! That would be pretty cool.

What do you wear to bed?

A T-shirt. But I hate when my T-shirts are washed.

Doesn't the shirt start to smell?

I've only been sleeping in it. When I tour, I also take my pillow. And I have nice dreams; the fabric really affects my shit. So I don't like to wash my sleep clothes. Now, my drawers, yes—there's open areas and ...

Let's stop there. Would you ever get plastic surgery?

If I lost my arm, I'd get robotics. Or would I? You know when you get a cut? And, magically delicious, it turns into skin again? Theoretically, we have that functionality to grow a new arm back. We just don't know how to do it.

Who do people think you look like?

Wyclef! And they think I look like that other dude in Canada, k-os. We look like triplets. Whoopi Goldberg could be my mom, and Billy Ocean could be our daddy. That would be some kooky shit. [BLENDER]

f

"MY BRAIN'S A LITTLE PREGNANT!"



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